11
AUTUMN 2015

THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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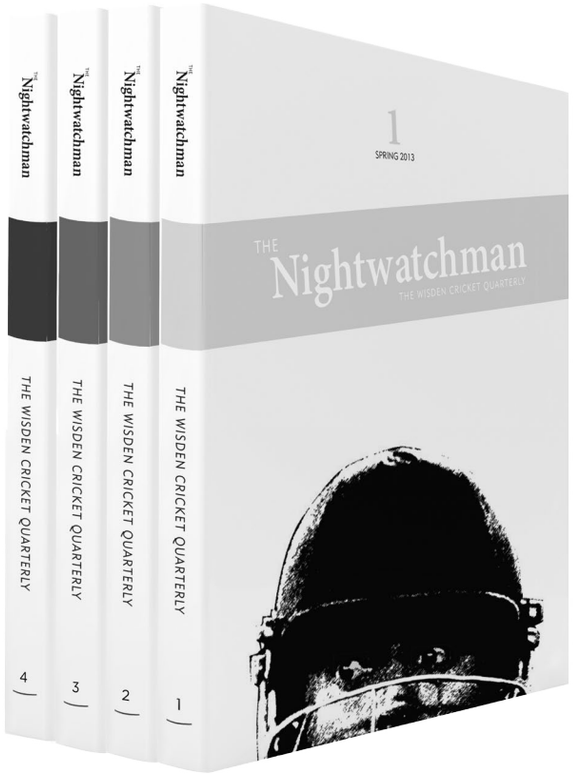

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ISSUE 11 – AUTUMN 2015

OPENERS

Welcome to issue 11. September has come around once more and we have now completed a full batting order of issues of *The Nightwatchman*. We like to think we've selected a wide range of players – nervous debutants, orthodox stylists, maverick big-hitters, gnarled old pros whose eyes and legs may have gone but who can still dazzle and delight with their brilliance, wristy mystery spinners, purveyors of new-fangled scoops and switch hits, and a smattering of not-quite-sure-what-you're-going-to-get all-rounders.

This issue may, using batting order parlance, be last man in for our first XI but we trust its contribution to the total will be no less significant for that fact. We cover a lot of ground – from late-18th century shenanigans involving an unsporting sporting priest, on to WG (100 years dead this October) and his influence from beyond the grave, through to the Golden Age, to an early-20th century poet, to a tragic accident on the village green in the 1930s that bears a striking resemblance to Phillip Hughes's untimely death last year. From there, on again to two West Indians of the mid-20th century – one executed, one writing intriguing letters on a tour of the UK – and finally to the present day, where we feature blind cricket, the difficulties of being Pakistan captain, the boorishness of the Aussie male, and the very personal story of how a cricket journalist came to make a film about Test cricket entitled *Death of a Gentleman* while his mother was steadily losing her battle with a terminal illness.

We also have two pieces – written by men who have 60 years in journalism and close to 50 books between them – that combine cricket and the act, art even, of writing. First, Simon Barnes extends the seven-plot theory to cricket, and talks us through each of the story types with examples from the game, contending that: "time and again, sport repeats our most ancient tales and reconnects us with one of the things that defines our humanity: we tell stories. We are a species of fabulists and that is why sport is a fabulous thing." And then Gideon Haigh gets meta with writing, writing about writing while sitting at the other end of the table from Mike Atherton, who is also writing. It's worth reading.

At the end of another Ashes contest (the third in our two and a half years as a publication) we showcase some rarely-seen photos from the vaults that go way, way back, to a time when the game was so different and yet still the same.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *The Nightwatchman*, and please do contact us at editor@thenightwatchman.net if you have any comments. Remember that we'll look at each and every submission (but promise nothing) that fulfils these basic criteria – the pieces feature cricket (however tangential), are interesting, original and, if at all possible, beautiful.

Matt Thacker,
September 2015

UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF WG

Charlie Connelly on a childhood mentor

The bottom drawer of my desk is a place normally best tackled with a pair of industrial safety gauntlets, ideally from a different postcode. When forced to confront it recently in an attempt to locate an old document, I pulled from its further recesses a small, grey cardboard folder. Inside there was a photograph and a small cutting from a magazine, neither of which I'd seen for a very long time.

The photograph was of my school's 1982 under-12 cricket team with me standing at the end of the back row, the smallest, skinniest and speckiest of the bunch. Despite more than 30 years having passed, I can still name every member of that side even though I've not seen any of them since the day we left school, including the science teacher standing at the opposite end of the row to me who picked the team and was known for some reason as "Tufty".

My erstwhile teammates are probably all high up in insurance and banking now, living in massive mock-Tudor mansions in the Home Counties and still playing golf together. They were the sporting elite, switching seamlessly between cricket, rugby and athletics, all of them effortlessly talented and brimming with cocky self-assurance even then: the seated front row are already manspreading at 11 years old.

The odd one out was me. Shy, timid, wincingly uncoordinated and in a permanent state of anxiety that the world was about to be annihilated in a nuclear holocaust. Also, utterly lousy at cricket.

The cutting tucked in with the photograph, meanwhile, was from a local magazine of some kind. It featured a picture from an outdoor event in which two women stand talking to a jovial figure leaning on a walking stick who looks very familiar

indeed. Although he was of advanced years when the image was taken – indeed, he had only a few months to live – the waistline and long beard are unmistakable: even now, a century after his death, WG Grace remains one of the most instantly recognisable sporting figures in the world.

Rather improbably these two photographs were taken nearly 70 years apart at exactly the same location. On the same field where the school's 11-year-old cricketing elite – and me – lined up for the camera in 1982, 67 years earlier in the summer of 1915 the greatest cricketer in the history of the game, in the final weeks of his life, had acted as a track marshal at the school's sports day, the occasion at which that grainy photograph was taken. On the same patch of turf around which the Champion had hobbled with a stopwatch and a tape measure I was embarrassing the game of cricket, batting at No.11, dropping any catches that happened to come my way and graciously allowing any ground shots in my vicinity to pass unimpeded through my hands, between my legs and on to the boundary.

Despite the pan-galactic distance between our respective levels of sporting prowess, I felt a great affinity with WG. Not in any practical cricketing sense. Christ, no. It was mainly the fact that twice a day, once in the morning, once in the afternoon, I would walk past his house on my way to and from school, something that led to WG Grace becoming my imaginary friend for a while.

Fairmount, the solid and imposing Victorian house where Grace spent his final years, is in Mottingham, a suburb of south-east London. You've probably never heard of Mottingham. Few people have. It's one of those barely-noticeable in-between places, sandwiched by Eltham and Bromley in the edgeland that straddles London and Kent and is desired by neither. The school was in-between too: in one direction lay the leafy, meandering lanes of huge, timber-framed houses with Kent addresses where most of my contemporaries lived; in the other were the rigid lines of London terraced housing and busy main roads where I grew up.

My journey between school and home took me past Fairmount, then as now an old people's home, with its imposing gables, large bay windows and the bright blue plaque above the porch announcing it as the erstwhile home of the greatest cricketer of all time. For an 11-year-old kid who didn't belong and was beginning to channel this ever-present, pre-pubescent ennui into an increasing obsession with cricket, this was really something: a tangible connection with a genuine legend, a man whose enigmatic posthumous caricature I came to mould into a plausible personality for my own pooterish ends.

The more I passed the house the more I imagined the Old Man still in there somewhere, reading a newspaper, say, or catching up with correspondence at his writing desk, maybe even having a net in the back garden. I'd gawp at the large windows, wishing really hard that one day a familiar bearded face might appear in one and wave at me. Or even, gulp, beckon me over and escort me to the garden for a bit of coaching. Eventually I began to imagine that he really was at the window, conjuring up

that familiar bearded rotundity behind the panes as we began nodding to each other as I passed.

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To this day I've no idea how or why I was picked for the school cricket team in that summer of 1982. The previous winter my dad had signed me up for coaching sessions at Alf Gover's cricket school. Every Sunday morning, rain or sleet, he'd drive me around the South Circular Road in our tubercular-sounding Renault 4 to Wandsworth where I'd don dank-smelling pads from an old bag in the dank-smelling changing-room and spend an hour shivering beneath the gas lamps as Alf attempted to instil in me and a clutch of other unpromising hopefuls the virtues of a straight bat.

Winter turned to spring, spring turned to summer and the school teams for the Saturday matches began going up on a noticeboard every Thursday morning. Each week I'd find a reason to pass the board and casually glance down the list of names while making it look like I wasn't: as a renowned sporting doofus if anyone saw me looking hopefully at the team list, I thought, I'd be laughed all the way out of the school gates. No, my dream was my own.

One day I brushed my gaze lightly down the team sheet and when I got to the bottom there was my name. I walked on a good ten paces or more then stopped dead. What? No. What? Hang on.

I tiptoed back to the board and looked at the piece of lined paper affixed efficiently with a drawing pin at each corner. "Under-12s v. City of London," it said, listing the familiar names of the sporting clique until, at the bottom, it definitely said "11. CONNELLY".

When the bell went for the end of the school day I was out of the door on the "d" of "ding": there was somebody to whom I needed to impart this momentous news. When I reached Fairmount, red-cheeked and out of breath, I stopped, stood in the entrance to the driveway and faced the house. In my imagination the front door opened and a tall, portly man with a long, grey beard stepped out and looked at me. I blurted out my announcement, a smile creased through the facial thatch, he nodded his head and stepped back inside.

At home, once the disbelief and elation had worn off, the fear set in. I wasn't so much nervous about the coming game as utterly petrified and the hours passed at a glacial pace. I spent the evening before the game folding and unfolding my cricket gear, persuaded my dad to throw me some catches in the back garden and switched out the light ahead of a fretful, sleepless night.

The following day was chilly, with low dull cloud scudding across the south London sky and a gusty wind rippling my school shirt. My mum was knitting me a cricket jumper but it wasn't finished yet. I shivered slightly, looking around my teammates in their proper jumpers embellished with the logos of Lyle and Scott and Gray-Nicolls.

We bowled first and I was put at square leg – as safely out of the way as the captain could manage – and saw little of the ball, which suited me

just fine. Then our batsmen struggled and wickets fell. With each delighted soprano shriek from the opposition it became inevitable that the services of the debutant No.11 would be required. When the ninth wicket went down with the match way out of reach my stomach plummeted to earth and my vision swam. I made my way reluctantly out to the middle, feeling more than ever like I didn't belong: everyone seemed so confident, so attuned to the rhythms of the game, while I was shaking with terror and could barely remember which way up to hold my size-five Duncan Fearnley GT1000.

From the school cricket bag, I'd extracted yellowing pads that didn't match, gloves so old they had green rubber spikes on the fingers as padding, while in my underpants sat a pink plastic triangle to protect my undescended vitals that had me walking to the wicket like John Wayne with haemorrhoids. When this shambolic, rag-and-bone ensemble arrived at the crease Tufty, umpiring at the other end, asked if I wanted a guard. I didn't know what that meant.

"No, thank you," I said. There were a couple of sniggers from behind the wicket.

I faced the bowler, mouth completely dry, limbs like jelly, convinced I would be out first ball, and prepared for the inevitable. He ran in, let go – and WG Grace spoke to me.

"Foot to the pitch," he said, "straight bat."

I lunged towards the ball and it squirted off the outside edge, rolling past the slips towards third man.

"Yes!" came the call from the other end. I ran for my life, pads flapping, bat pointing skyward, abdominal protector working its way down my right thigh, and somehow made it to the non-striker's end with all the grace and elegance of Norman Wisdom on roller skates. It had been far from pretty but I'd scored a run and I'd never felt remotely as happy about anything in my life.

"Well run, lad," said WG's voice inside my head.

I leaned on my bat, dreamily replaying the shot and the run in my mind.

"Back up," said Tufty in an urgent stage whisper out of the side of his mouth as the bowler's footsteps approached again.

"Yes, sir," I whispered assertively in reply and, not having a clue what he was talking about, kept leaning on my bat.

The next thing I knew, I was called for a run, set off from a standing start behind the return crease and was run out by five yards as the abdominal protector settled itself over my right kneecap, the flaps of my pads became entangled and I fell flat on my face, skidding to a halt just in front of the broken wicket. As I walked off spitting out dust and brushing grass cuttings from my hair, I tried to look appropriately crestfallen at the heavy defeat. Inside, however, I was delighted. Not only had I scored a run off the only ball I'd faced but I wouldn't have to face any more. Somebody from our team called me a useless wanker as I approached the boundary but I didn't care. That run. That run had given me the best feeling of my entire 11 years on the planet.

On the Monday morning I practically floated to school thinking about that run. I stopped at the driveway to Fairmount and waited for WG to emerge from the door. He stood on the doorstep in a grey worsted three-piece suit and looked at me quizzically. I gushed a breathless summary of my debut, at the conclusion of which he smiled, touched the brim of his hat and stepped back inside.

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Somehow I kept my place in the team through my school years. I started catching as many chances as I dropped, scored a handful of runs and became a firmly committed backer-up at the non-striker's end. I stopped having fictitious conversations with WG Grace but retained a deep feeling for the man as he was in his later years. For me he would never be the black-bearded leviathan of the famous Colman's mustard advertisement; he was always the kindly old gent with the walking stick and the wiry tumble of streaky grey falling halfway down his chest.

It was only recently, while researching the twilight years of Grace's life, that I realised we had an even closer cricketing connection than mere neighbourhood proximity, one onto which I could bolt a self-indulgent affectation similar to our imaginary childhood friendship. On 25 July 1914, as clouds of war gathered over Europe, Grace turned out for Eltham Cricket Club against Grove Park a week after his 66th birthday. Going in at No.6 with barely 20 on the board, he made 69 not out of Eltham's 155 for 6 declared, top scoring by some distance. This would be his last innings. No big farewell in front of a packed Lord's, no guard of honour from the Australian Test team and gushing telegrams arriving from all corners, just a smattering of applause from a few straw-hatted south-east Londoners distracted by the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia.

The ground on which he made that score was at Marvels Lane, Grove Park, and belonged to the City of London school. WG Grace's last run was scored on the same field where I made my first.

Of course, trying to establish a direct cricket link between the greatest of them all and a knock-kneed butterfingers like me is a ridiculous undertaking, but I admit I did find unearthing the symmetry of Marvels Lane pleasing. At 12 years old I'd projected a personality onto Grace that suited my own insecurities, for he was a suitably malleable figure. Even in his own lifetime he became almost a caricature of himself – the girth, the beard, the anecdotes of tolerated gamesmanship – to the extent that the man himself became practically unknowable. Like many geniuses his approach to the game was simple: effectively a mantra of "take each ball on its own merits", while what few contemporary accounts of his personality remain suggest he was an open, uncomplicated, almost child-like character. We could all feel a potential connection to him because we could make him anyone we wanted him to be.

For me the key to the man behind the mythologies lay not in the endless records, statistics and hoary old third-hand stories but in the gaps between and beyond. In his advanced years those gaps became wider, and knowing the streets he walked, the grounds on which he played his last games

and the house in which he spent his last years gave Grace an extra, more human dimension in my mind. I began again to construct a new version of the Champion, still with a joyful zest for life and an infectious sense of fun but also a more introspective, sensitive and reflective man than the hagiographical tributes suggested, a man with a life beyond cricket, a man with fears and worries and who carried with him the pain of loss and bereavement.

When I stand in front of Fairmount today, a century after his death in the main bedroom, I still feel awe in the presence of one of the greatest sporting figures we've ever known whose towering achievements are enshrined in cricket lore forever. Behind the panes, however, I also sense the very human, ailing, bedridden old man in his final days, stricken by a stroke and spooked by the malicious low hum of passing zeppelins in the night.

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WAITING TO SEND

Gideon Haigh talks about what he talks about when writing

I have been asked to write a piece for *The Nightwatchman*. About what I'm not entirely sure. I feel faintly uneasy. But then, at this prospect, I always do, and somehow it has always ended up getting done.

It's made me think at any rate. Because this month is actually 25 years since the publication of my first cricket article, in *Wisden Cricket Monthly*. It concerned a County Championship match at The Oval, all four days of which I attended, in which Lancashire made 803 in reply to 9 for 707. At the moment, coincidentally, I am sitting in the living room of one of the players who made a hundred in that game, Mike Atherton, now my friend and *Times* colleague. He is at the other end of his dining-room table in the act of writing a column about England's selection for the third Ashes Test. He is using a battered old silver MacBook Air identical to mine. The tableau is a little like a literary Magritte painting. Because while I watch someone write a column, I'm contemplating a column about columns.

Mike is looking out the window just now. He hasn't typed anything for a few minutes. We were chatting earlier about Gary Ballance and Ian Bell, the difficulty of sizing replacements up given the lack of pace and the shallow ranks of spin bowling in the County Championship. He's drawing a few ideas together, preliminary to committing his thoughts to print, as am I. Curious: I've never really thought about how people do this, including me. Yet it's the form of writing I've done most of: columns of 900–1,000 words about cricket, expressing opinion, describing action, capturing moments. And it's very different to my other main form of writing, of books, which I do alone, surrounded usually by other books. Today Mike and I have only one another for company; quite a lot of the time we tap away in a room full of other people describing similar events, at similar lengths, for similar publications.

In some senses, it's an activity that's changed little from a hundred years ago when the likes of Pelham Warner wrote for the *Morning Post* and Philip Trevor for the *Daily Telegraph*. After the First World War, Neville Cardus raised it to an art form in the *Guardian*. He might not recognise cricket any more, but he could still relate to the act of writing about it. Certain unchanged aspects of cricket lend themselves naturally to opining: the amount of time it takes; the amount of that time in repose, between balls, between games; and now, funnily enough, the degree of its electronic diffusion, which means that many, many people see it who aren't there and who wish to check their views against those who are. As a proportion of overall output, there's probably more opinion generation than ever, television and radio bearing the main brunt of instant reporting.

In the apparatus dedicated to following the game, written media occupy a special, at times slightly uneasy space. We do not pay for our privileges: our lanyards reveal us to be "non-rights holders". We are less of a clerisy than in the days of, say, EW Swanton or John Woodcock, and are now in some respects quite marginal to the game. The true opinion shapers are the eminences of the commentary box, heavy with playing honours – Mike, of course, doubles as one of those. But there's still something about words nailed down, rather than in flight, that provokes response. As Cardus wrote in comparing the publics whom he served as music critic and cricket writer: "If I said that the *Hammerklavier Sonata* was the last thing Beethoven wrote, I'd get a couple of dozen letters, 75 per cent from foreigners. But if I said that Sir Leonard Hutton made 363 at The Oval in 1938, I'd get thousands from Yorkshiremen alone."

Mike's just got up to make coffee, wonders if I'd like one. Frankly, I should be making the coffee. I sometimes say that between us we played 115 Tests for England, but I enjoy no natural authority. I'm no more than averagely opinionated about cricket; I am fair-to-poor at prediction, no better than ordinary as a judge of talent. My head is overstocked with cricket memories mixed with history and biography, while I've an abiding interest in cricket's business and politics, partly because these seldom seem to interest many others. But in this sense I don't feel myself much advantaged as a cricket writer, especially given my everyday earnest incompetence as a cricket player.

Which may be why I've continued at it – for the stimulation of the constant low-key stress involved in finding new things to say about old things. Batsmen hit a ball, bowlers try to get them out; players play well and badly, set records good and bad; players get picked and dropped; coaches, selectors and administrators are perceived as a result to have succeeded and failed. A writer of female erotica once said to me: "The challenge with writing my stuff is that sex is such a repetitive activity." I replied: "That's the challenge with writing my stuff too." How many ways can you describe the activities of cricket meaningfully, in such a way that it doesn't sound like something said many, many times before, but also in such a way that doesn't sound like a flight of gratuitous fancy? I've wondered this for 25 years, then consoled myself with the advice that the Martian gives Woody Allen in *Stardust Memories*: "You want to help mankind? Tell funnier jokes."

Being a current player, even an exceedingly modest one, adds a little layer of interest too. Winning; losing; staying in; getting out; attacking; being

attacked: it's not only big-time cricketers who do these things. Funnily enough, just last summer I developed a new sense of sympathy with modern players. I won my very first flag in 40 years as a club cricketer. On retirements I had until that time taken a fairly unsentimental line – that rational self-appraisal was the duty of every cricketer; that big wins should be regarded as opportune moments for graceful departures. But if top cricketers feel anywhere near as good as I did after forming part of the Yarras 3rds in the Mercantile Cricket Association C-Grade, then I don't wonder that quitting is hard, because my first instinct was not to rest on my laurels but to want to feel that good again.

Hmmm. Mike has just typed something. Must have been good, because he is – the best in the business, I think. And he just wrote something else. I bet it was smart. Unlike this rubbish I'm writing. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea. There's that voice – the voice that tells you you're missing the point, off on your own folly, speculating idly. But, of course, some days it's like that. A trend is hard to delineate. The ideas refuse to form. On the days you are writing about an actual game, the play may be uninspiring, the context unclear. You commit too early. You start too late.

Of course, you hanker to watch exciting, dramatic cricket; but, perhaps even more so, you wish it to occur on a timetable conducive to straightforward interpretation and punctual delivery. The two do not necessarily always go hand-in-hand. An example that sticks in my memory was the Lord's Test ten years ago, when England walked off to a "glory-glory-Ashes-coming-home" ovation at tea having bowled Australia out for 190. As this was obviously the story, I duly wrote so for the *Guardian*. Then English wickets started falling. "Yes, that's not good for England," I said after each. "But hey, the story is still their bowling and Australia's batting, right?" Not with England 7 for 92 it wasn't. My 1,000 carefully chosen words had perforce to be dustbinned, 1,000 more in praise of Glenn McGrath cobbled together. Not that the first lot were bad; they were just wrong for the occasion. Not that the second were any better; they were merely more current.

I swapped stories recently with Martin Johnson, who inevitably had a better one, about a 1993 B&H Cup group game involving Surrey and Lancashire at The Oval – the first in which cameras were used for line decisions. There was a run-out sent upstairs which revealed only David Shepherd's ample posterior, around which Martin crafted a typically wry and waspish column, then filed it with Surrey on 1 for 212 chasing 236 as he was embarking on a hot date. Unfortunately, Surrey promptly lost their last nine wickets for 18. Martin found himself on a phone trying to dictate an additional paragraph that a) salvaged the piece, and b) redeemed his evening. He had to admit he rather failed. A week or so later he ran into the game's individual award-winner, Neil Fairbrother, whom Martin had failed to mention in his piece at any stage. Fairbrother, he said, did a double-take. "I know what you're thinking," said Martin, getting in first. "And you're right."

Watching a day's cricket in order to write of it critically, I've often thought, is like trying to review a stage show in which two theatre companies attempt simultaneously to present different plays, absorbing into the cast their unwilling rivals. Space and time fluctuate unhelpfully too. Perhaps you have 800 words when you want 1,000; perhaps you have 1,200 when you need only 700; perhaps you have early-Friday deadlines when you need the time to weigh and consider. At least in my experience, rare are the days you leave feeling you've got it even half-right, and there can be very bad days when you feel it is entirely wrong, and no sooner have you filed than you rewrite compulsively in your head. Pressing the "send" button is the best and worst moment of the day, the long-term question being whether relief or regret will be the abiding emotion.

Hmmm, I've just mentioned that 1993 game to Mike. He remembers it; he played in it; it's on YouTube. That's one thing that has assuredly changed since the days of Cardus: the tools at our disposal. When I started, some colleagues still arrived in the press box weighed down with *Wisdens*. Now it's more Google than googlies, no score being more than a few keystrokes away. Cricket writing features more stats because there are more stats handy; a "good stat" is almost tantamount to a scoop.

Back in the day, there was an almost-puritanical commitment to arriving at one's own perspective. In *The Australians in England* (1961), Charles Fortune described his shock at finding that a few reporters in the Lord's press box were listening to radios. What was the world coming to when scribes required help in arriving at their opinions? What would Fortune make of our quarters now, festooned with screens, humming with radio headsets, a nerve centre of social media? As a luddite, I confine myself to studying the occasional replay; but I've also sat next to reporters who've barely raised their heads from Twitter.

This being so, I may be the wrong person to reflect on how this shades what we write. A broad consensus usually *does* form on a day's play, and always has, not because cricket journalists are particularly conformist thinkers, but because groups of people watching and discussing the same thing will tend to agree on the narrative that divides them least. In that sense, watching, reading and listening to other media, social and antisocial, expedites a process bound to happen anyway. But it does place a heavy onus on those in the business of the instant: one of my friends from Cricinfo recently described to me the experience of walking in the back of a press box to see a hundred or so laptop screens all showing his website. It also poses a challenge to stay fresh and new when daily journalism is at best a third draft of history, and possibly even a fourth. Given the game's modern fascination with epiphenomena – stats, quotes, replays, graphics – you might wonder where the incentive to watch the play still comes from. Perhaps in time a day's play will come to be regarded purely as a form of data generation. I hope I won't live to see it.

Mike's got his head down now. How's his piece going? "Almost done," he says. "I was thinking more about the column I have to write tomorrow." Yes, we – all of us – in a way are on this treadmill, meeting the moment's needs, shooting at moving targets. After a while you just have to draw a line under things, let your piece go and hope to do better tomorrow. "I'm just going to file," says Mike. Think I might do the same.

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SIGHT:SCREEN

Alan Tyers delves into cricket's video vault

Cricket has a rich and varied literature and has attracted the attention of some of the finest writers to pick up a pen. It has a deep well of emotions, issues and concepts from which to draw. It has a cast of fascinating, heroic and dastardly characters both contemporary and historical. Its cultural reach across the globe is huge. And yet its cinema is strangely undercooked. What films and television shows have been made about cricket, what do they have in common – and why have cricket fans not got the screen representations they deserve?

An enduring theme throughout cricket's history on screen, quite understandably, has been that of the Dastardly Englishman. There is no broader target than the sour, stuck-up English colonial lording it over the "natives", his reedy bluster of fair play and stiff upper lip shown up as hypocrisy at the first sight of resistance. *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India*, the best cricket film of recent years, has tremendous fun with this.

But no episode in cricket's screen history has featured better cruel colonials than Australia's gloriously overblown 1984 mini-series *Bodyline*. Hugo Weaving, honing the sociopathic detachment he would in later years put to such good effect as Agent Smith in *The Matrix*, played a chilly, ruthless Douglas Jardine. If the series didn't show Jardine punching a baby koala repeatedly in the face, it was surely only due to budgetary constraints. Highly entertaining, *Bodyline* nevertheless found no cliché too hoary: one memorable scene had Harold Larwood bowling with an actual lump of coal in a Nottinghamshire pit, while Jardine puts the moves on a lady by reciting the "two sides, one out in the field and one in" tea-towel. And the dismissive reaction of the buffers back at Lord's to the Australian howls of fury at leg theory set the template for a generation of spoof portrayals of pompous old pink-gin blazers.

The *Bodyline* series tackled bravely – and without a helmet – the always-troublesome problem of portraying actual sportsmen. Do you go for a lookalike, or a sort-of-lookalike, or just someone who can capture something of the essence of the individual? With some of the figures in this account, the distance of time is on the side of the film-makers: how many cricket fans could honestly say they would pick Bill Voce out of a line-up?

With modern productions, the problem has become more acute. Another Australian mini-series, *Howzat! Kerry Packer's War*, had much to recommend it, not least a muscular, charismatic performance from Lachy Hulme as the businessman who shook up the hidebound sport with his World Series Cricket. The 2012 production from Channel 9 naturally had to portray many instantly recognisable household names.

The depictions of Dennis Lillee and Rod Marsh basically consisted of stunt moustache wearing. The characterisation of Doug Walters was effected through the famous Stanislavskian method of Making The Actor Smoke A Ciggy The Whole Time. The combination of a lot of double denim, and wide-collared shirts tucked into jeans with big belts as manly men said manly things to each other through their manly moustaches and stormed out of boardrooms was highly (often unintentionally) enjoyable, calling to mind many of the scenes from *Anchorman*. Surely on the cutting-room floor there is a scene where these iterations of Ian Chappell and Paul Hogan discuss the application of Sex Panther and its advantages in snaring sheilas.

Yet it was the character of Richie Benaud that caused the most problems. Actor Peter Houghton – who does not look anything like Benaud – further proved himself to be literally the only person on the planet who cannot do a Richie Benaud impression. Sure, you might not want to be immortalised on celluloid giving it the "Morning, everyone" or the "Two-two-two for two" like a cut-price Rory Bremner, but how could you not at least try? Caught on the crease, playing neither back nor forward, Houghton managed instead to deliver someone as unlike Benaud as it is possible to imagine without the great man being portrayed by, say, Whoopi Goldberg.

Much of cricket's presentation on the screen has tended towards the comic. All the way back in 1938, Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* launched the improbable career of Charters and Caldicott. These characters, light relief in the thriller, are more concerned with getting back to England in time for the end of the Test than the far less serious matter of a missing person. Audiences ate it up, and the partnership of Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne appeared in 11 more films over the 1930s and 1940s, notably *Passport to Pimlico*. They generally played a pair of posh twits who loved cricket. In 1949, now trading as Bright And Early after a bust-up regarding the rights to the C&C name, they headlined *It's Not Cricket*, starring as two intelligence officers badly lacking in intelligence who are wrestling with the always-thorny problem of a star batsman who turns out to be a war criminal. Perhaps the ECB will remake it with KP in the villain's role.

A few years earlier, C Aubrey Smith, the Sussex quick bowler who played one Test for England, had moved to Hollywood to further his other career:

acting. A tall, imposing character actor who made over 100 films, mostly for MGM, he became the archetype for portrayals of Englishmen in American movies: patrician, stiff upper lip, the quintessential gentleman. He founded the Hollywood Cricket Club. PG Wodehouse took the minutes at the inaugural meeting, and legends including Boris Karloff, Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone and David Niven turned out for the side, which drew considerable local curiosity in California. In 1932, Arthur Mailey organised a touring party of Australians. Don Bradman played against Hollywood and scored 52, 18 and 83, all not out. He was also among a party of Australian cricketers given a tour of MGM; there is a picture of the cast of *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. Boris Karloff and The Don, together at last: surely the greatest cricket-and-dramatic-arts crossover until Samuel Beckett taught his neighbour André The Giant about cricket as he gave him lifts to school. Bradman may only have been photographed on set in Los Angeles, but when another Ashes captain, Archie MacLaren, came to stay, Smith went one better and got the visitor a part in the war movie *The Four Feathers*.

The sportsman cameo has a rich and cheesy tradition in the movies. *The Final Test*, a bittersweet little drama written by Terrence Rattigan and directed by Anthony Asquith, featured cameos from Denis Compton, Len Hutton and Cyril Washbrook, as well as a lead performance from Jack Warner (*Dixon of Dock Green*, not the FIFA rat-bag). Rattigan and Asquith were proper heavyweights, but the tale is a curiously wispy one with hints at things unsaid: a young boy who snubs attending his cricketer father's last professional game to instead hero-worship a *poet* of all things… who turns out to be a cricket fan after all. Not, it goes without saying, that the cricketing greats have much to do other than turn up and look chappish.

It is India, naturally, where opportunities proliferate for heroes to swap the whites for greasepaint. *Victory* (2009) is a no-nonsense, against-the-odds sports flick that is distinguished mainly by the sheer volume of cameos: if you have ever said to yourself "what I really want is a so-so film about an unpromising cricketer-turned international star that features not only Pat Symcox but Chaminda Vaas," then look no further. As for Mandira Bedi, familiar to British viewers as the one-time presenter of ITV's IPL coverage, starring in *Meerabai Not Out* as a cricket-mad runaway bride gave her a chance to work with Anil Kumble. The performance of the 10 for 74 hero in turn stood Bedders in great stead when, years later, she had to try to coax insights out of Stewarty, Hicky, and John Emburey-y and, indeed, if she ever wants to find work as a carpenter.

Oddly, Bollywood and India's other cinema industries have had limited success with cricket pictures. Possibly the mere silver screen could not hope to match the frantic, obsessive drama of the Indian fan's relationship with his or her heroes. Many Indian films about cricket have felt uneven in tone – for instance, *Stumped*, which sounds like it might be a slapstick comedy, and features a brief appearance from God himself, Sachin Tendulkar, but turns out to be about… the war on terror. Probably fair to say that this one is strictly for Sachin completists.

Chennai 600028, about two feuding amateur teams, was a rare hit – perhaps because it had a simple method and stuck to it. Sports movies in India have tended towards the functional, either boy-must-choose-between-cricket-and-girl or simple loser-seeks-glory stories. *Hattrick* is among the better examples of the former category, although, for the viewer not too familiar with Indian cinema, the propensity of everyone on screen to break out a full chops song-and-dance number at the drop of a hat can be alarming. Especially as lots of the action centres on a hospital. And it's not just players popping up on the screen: *Hattrick* features Harsha Bhogle in the role of Harsha Bhogle.

It is often said that the success of IPL cricket has been the fusion of movie glamour with sporting entertainment. *Jeeva* (2014) takes the formula to its logical conclusion, by making a rags-to-riches movie about a boy who dreams of playing for the Rajasthan Royals. After all, what youngster has not one day dreamed of treading the same turf as Michael Lumb?

When veering away from the plain-boiled-rice sporting narrative, results have varied wildly. To the makers of *Mazhavillinattam Vare*, a brave stab at a match-fixing drama that featured Sreesanth in a cameo, one can extend only sympathy. Over on the other side of the world, Barbados also boasts a recent illegal-betting drama, the groaningly named *Hit for Six*, with walk-ons from Tino Best as well as Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes. It seems fair to say that this hugely important question facing the game is yet to receive its definitive treatment. Also attempting to Tackle Issues, was *Iqbal*, an unusually sensitive 2005 effort, in which Kapil Dev took a cameo in a film about a deaf-mute boy who dreams of playing for India.

In England, however, cricket has rarely been a subject for drama, with a "Colonel Blimp eating fish-paste sandwiches" comic sensibility dominating, possibly as a function of inverse-snobbery from lefty TV and movie types with their hands on the money tap. The 1980s saw the comedy *Outside Edge*, which featured a Test-class cast including Paul Eddington as the Captain Mainwaring-ish skipper of his leafy village cricket team, and Prunella Scales as his power-behind-the-throne wife. It was expanded into a sitcom series in the 1990s. Much like the England team of that era, it was less than the sum of its parts (Robert Daws, Brenda Blethyn, Timothy Spall) and was largely going for the gentle side of gentle comedy.

The sport's appeal to a variety of wildly different cultures who were unfortunate enough to be colonised by the English has begat a sub-genre of cricket comedy: the "worlds collide". The 1980s film *Playing Away* starred Norman Beaton (the Guyanese-born actor who assured his place in the sitcom pantheon as Desmond Ambrose in *Desmond's*) as one of a group of South London cricketers who play away in a leafy white suburb. It's rather good, and also featured a young Ross Kemp and Neil Morrissey. Ploughing a similar furrow, although more sentimentally, was 2003's *Wondrous Oblivion*, a coming-of-age story about a Jewish boy in 1960s working-class London who strikes up

an unlikely friendship with his new middle-aged Jamaican neighbour. And *Patiala House*, reportedly based on the experiences of Monty Panesar, is about a British Indian bowler whose dad is so aghast about his lad playing for the England team that he has a heart attack. Not a nuanced project, but it does feature a cameo from Nasser Hussain so it gets an extra star for that.

English-language films have been on more solid ground with documentary, from the John Arlott and Ralph Richardson narrated *Cricket* (1949), which calls to mind a high-class version of Harry Enfield's Mr Cholmondley-Warner and Greyson, to the BBC's superb *Empire of Cricket*, which examined the game in its wider post-colonial context. The glory days of the West Indies are chronicled in *Fire in Babylon*, a treat for all who grew up in the era of those giants, and especially interesting in its examination of Sir Vivian Richards and Black Consciousness. Less well known – but certainly worth a butcher's for those interested in the great West Indies teams – is the 1986 Ian Wooldridge documentary *Cricket Calypso*, which offers a contemporaneous account of what looked at the time like a dynasty that would last forever, but proved to be sadly anything but. At the time of writing, there are two very decent documentaries about the sport that are well worth a look: *Warriors*, a remarkable insight into the curious story of cricket and the Maasai warriors in Kenya, and *Death of a Gentleman*, a stirring polemic about cricket's murky governance.

All things considered, cricket has not been especially well served by the movies. The logistics of filming the actual sport have been a turn-off, and narratives have tended towards the hackneyed. In England, commissioning editors and studios have been suspicious of its perceived posh-ness, while in India, there has been the sense that they can just bung together any old rubbish because the audience is so hungry, much like selection for the Test team in recent tours.

With post-colonialism, money, corruption, culture clashes and stories of triumph from unpromising beginnings to draw upon, you'd think that a great cricket movie is waiting to get out. One that could perhaps even top Australia's 2008 comedy-horror *I know how many runs you scored last summer*?

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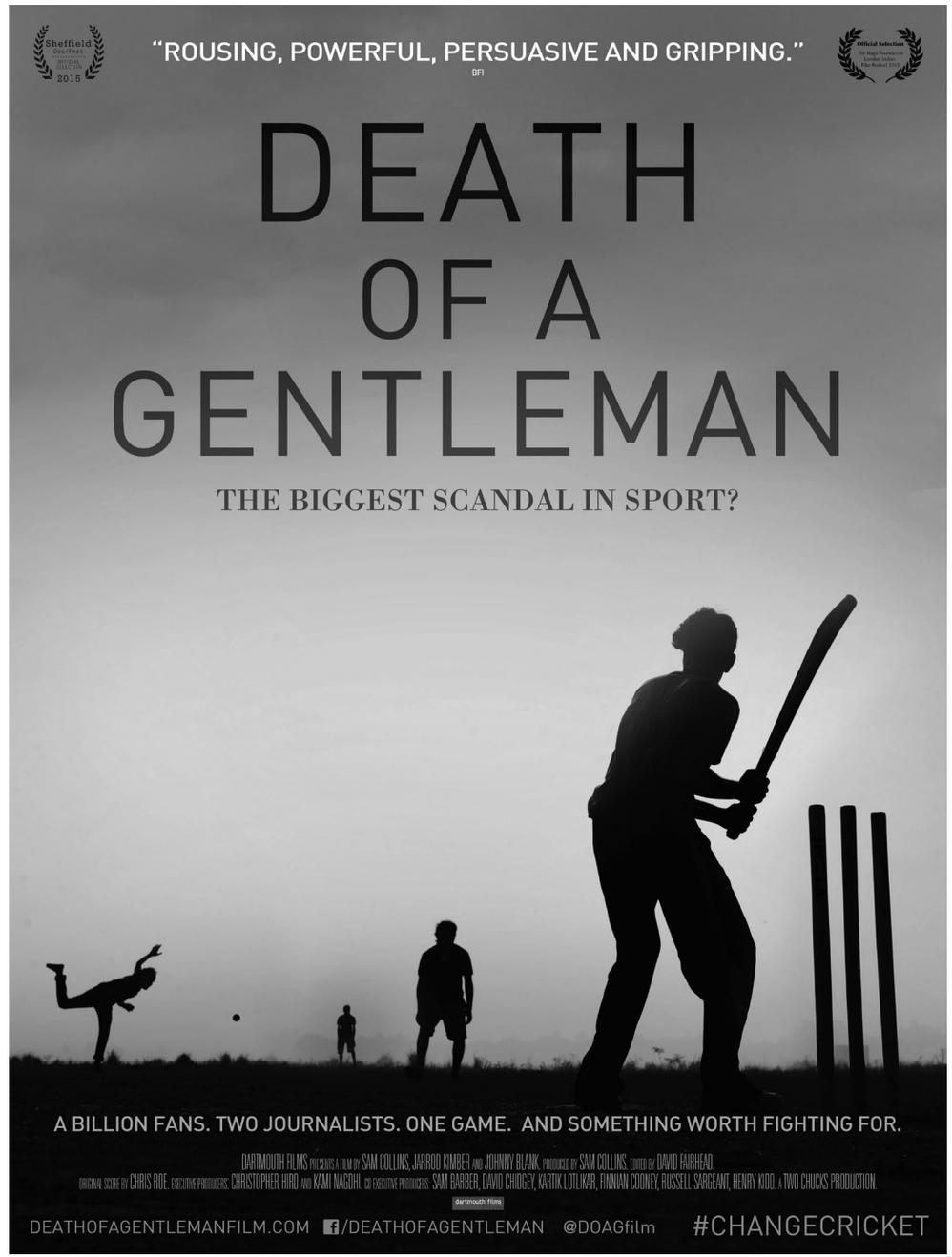

THE DEATH OF A JEWISH CRICKET TEAM

Benjamin Brill laments the passing of his former club

There is a beautiful story to be told about Newlands and Northwood Cricket Club, but I am not the man to tell it. I wasn't there that Saturday morning nearly 30 years ago when some friends got chatting in the stalls of a north London synagogue about maybe putting a team together. So I wasn't part of that first flush – that odd collection of committee men and committed atheists, teenage wide boys and exiled South Africans – that knitted itself together at the ground up at Broxbourne Park, with its railway track and painted pavilion. I missed the famous wins against Vale and Belmont and the other stalwarts of the Maccabi League, the August cup finals at Brondesbury and Stanmore, and the tours that forged unlikely friendships.

So even though I can picture the tons Simon Durban and Bob Luder posted at perfect grounds across the Cotswolds and the New Forest, and the trashed hotel room in Stratford-upon-Avon, with its door hanging off the hinges, that made the wedding speeches of both those responsible, I was somewhere else when those tours took place. And although I could probably sketch out for you now Simon Leach, smoking spliff in his car before going out to bat, or Norman Marine, with his galloping run-up and hair-trigger temper, or Neil Peterman, the opening bat who died from leukaemia at the same age I am now, I never met any of them.

I arrived too late in the day for any of that, so the only part of the story I can really tell you is its final chapter.

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It starts here: early summer, a playing field somewhere to the north of London. The sky is a blank slate and the ground is mottled and hard. Two-jumpers weather, but the only kit I've been able to cobble together is a long-sleeved shirt that was already too small when I left school seven years earlier, and a pair of boots with more studs missing than present. I shiver on the boundary, amongst ancient cricket bags and strewn equipment in my skimpy shirt and tracksuit bottoms, reading a section of the *Sunday Times* that someone has brought along. Anthony Etkind, second-team captain, is unimpressed.

"This won't do," he says, looking down at my tracksuit bottoms. "You'll need to ask the other team's captain for permission to play in those, you know."

Anthony is brisk with a bristling moustache and a bank-manager bearing. A wicket-keeper. I can't tell whether he is joking or not. I start to apologise and he interrupts…

"So, what is that you do then?" he fires at me.

"Er," I reply, "I bat, and bowl a bit of wrist-spin as well."

He seems unmoved by this exotic admission. "You can go in at eight," he says, and turns away to josh a late, unshaven arrival. "Mr Luder! So good of you to join us! You ok to open?"

I don't remember very much about the game. I bat, briefly and inconclusively, and pick up a couple of late lucky wickets with looping left-arm googlies. I ask the other team's captain for permission to wear tracksuit bottoms in the field. And I decide that this team of Jewish men the wrong side of 40, with its receding hairlines and thickening waists and creaking limbs held together by yards of strapping, is exactly the kind of team I would like to be a part of.

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My friends, they do not understand. Don't understand why I should sacrifice my summer Sundays in such a selfish way. When I show them my new cricket bag, they smile and nod, humouring me like a dull uncle. I imagine they imagine I can play a bit. That I cling to this fragment of my youth because I am one of those unlikelies who suddenly makes sense when they take to the pitch. That my slouch corrects itself as I stride out to bat. That in spite of my skinny frame and dodgy shoulder, my name is feared throughout the Jewish cricket world.

They are wrong. I am not a run-scorer or a wicket-taker. I am an erratic fielder and a menace to my own teammates when they are foolish enough to ask me to umpire. Of course, those days where everything clicks and I chip in with a 20 or a two-fer are one reason why I play, but it does not explain why I should schlep every Sunday from my small flat in east London up to these strange suburban outposts at the top end of the Metropolitan Line.

I left the suburbs of Jewish north Leeds when I was 18 and did not imagine I would miss them. Roots are a funny thing though. And as my old world has grown more distant, so I've started to feel a strange sort of longing for everything I'd been so keen

to leave behind. I miss the thick air of Shadwell Lane synagogue, the vinegar smell of a cold buffet of bridge rolls and pickled herring, and that strange sense of comfort in dislocation you only know if you feel an outsider on the streets where you were raised. Playing for Newlands and Northwood feels like returning to a chapter of my life I had imagined was closed.

The rest of the week, I am just another young man lost in a big city. But on Sundays now, everything is familiar. Here, conversations come dressed up in the mock-solemnity of synagogue ushers, all serious handshakes and Mr this and young man that. No one goes for a drink after the game. They are estate agents, financial advisers and doctors and everyone has known each other for years. Everyone talks and no one listens and no one minds a bit. I do not belong here, and yet I do.

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There are other reasons also, like the glimpses you get every so often of the players people used to be. Big Derrick Sheldon taking terrific tumbling catches at mid on, moving towards the ball like a felled tree, a determined look on his face. Benny Wolpe forcing his way to a brutal 70-odd, all bottom hand and stiff-legged bustle, the crack of ball on bat like the sound of a rifle going off. Anthony, now the wrong side of 60, still standing up and staying low to our medium pacers, and then cutting and carving his way to pugnacious little 20s down the order.

We do not win often, but that does not really matter too much at first. The solemn handshakes and the old jokes and the familiar conversations at tea – the feeling of being part of something – are enough for me. So it doesn't bother me that our best players are leaving, looking for better teams and bigger challenges, that we have left the Jewish league because we can no longer compete, or – beyond the selfish pang when I take the call on a Friday evening – that we have started cancelling games because we can't raise enough players. It doesn't matter that Anthony's eyes have started to go, that we can no longer count on Benny for five overs of seam-up, or that the strapping that has held so many creaking limbs together is getting more and more frayed.

But it matters to everyone else because they care about this little club that they built from nothing nearly 30 years ago. They don't admit it to their wives, but those days up at Broxbourne Park, the unlikely friendships they forged there, and the tours to the Cotswolds and the New Forest defined their twenties and thirties. Bowling figures they can still recite; catches held in aspic in their minds. They were fleeting moments but, for as long as they play on, those moments will not seem quite so distant.

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The collapses are getting even more frequent. Even more embarrassing. Benny sits alone by his bag, still wearing his pads, lighting one Marlboro Light off another after yet another second-ball duck. Bob Luder scratches around for an hour before getting himself out, and then spends the same amount of time berating himself for letting everyone down again. Our new captain, Jon Mymin, does all he can, hooping gentle away-swing past the outside edge for as many overs as he is allowed, but we struggle to take more than three wickets a game. Catches go down, heads drop, and a deep yawning silence has taken hold when we field, broken only by bursts of gallows humour and the occasional argument. Failure spawns failure spawns failure. We have forgotten how to win.

And yet each new season brings fresh hope, in the shape of an Indian doctor poached by Bob from the gerontology ward of the Middlesex Hospital, or a left-arm seamer fresh from university who keeps hitting the splice of Benny's bat in the pre-season nets. But each new season, our old team is one year older. And what little we can do is not enough. We have no ground of our own. We cannot ask for lottery grants to bring on kids. We have no way of finding new players. Clubs like ours are dying. Our club is dying.

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Five of us sit around a dining-room table in Southgate on a Tuesday night in January, discussing the season that has been and the season that may or may not follow. Jon is tired of the desperate weeknight ring-rounds for players. We are all tired of losing. We talk about disbanding, or merging, but no one wants to make the call. We agree to soldier on for one more season and one more tour, none of us admitting that we think it will be our last.

We have cobbled together some new players – ringers mostly – friends of friends of mine who've admitted over a drink at some point or other that they play. They look the part at pre-season nets and our best team is stronger on paper than it has been for years. Up at Finchley, on a freezing April afternoon, we run our first opponents close. One new recruit caresses his way to a classy hundred and takes three wickets for not too many. Another takes a tumbling catch on the boundary and grabs a quick 20. There are fresh faces and legs and voices in the field, and talk of a drink after the game for the first time I can remember. Things are looking up.

But the next week, we cannot raise a team.

And the week after, we get rained off. And the week after that as well.

By the time a miserable spring turns into a miserable summer, we have still only managed to play a couple of games. Those matches that aren't rained off, we have had to cancel. The new players, as promising as they look in the nets, are sticking-plasters on a deep wound. They cannot commit to play regularly and we cannot expect them to. It's not their club – they have no obligation, no real allegiance. By the time I take my seat in Bob Luder's car one sunny Thursday morning in July for the drive up to the Cotswolds and the first match of our tour, a decision has been taken: after Sunday's game, we are going to call it a day.

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Two days later, nine of us sit round a table in an Indian restaurant in Tewkesbury. All of the old crowd are there. It is noisy and dark and the table is covered in half-empty balti bowls and sizzler platters and pints of lager. Pilau rice is strewn like confetti – this is not a wake, it is a celebration. Mike Lurie is chatting up a waitress for the benefit of the boys, all stage winks and knowing innuendo. In the middle, Bob is settling in for a long innings, delightedly mopping up the dregs of everyone's gravy with corners of keema naan while Simon Durban asks him if he'll be getting a doggy bag to take back to his wife. "You can take the piss," replies Bob, "but this lot will keep her going for five days." Jon Mymin sips his beer inscrutably, while Anthony tells him about his plans for the rest of the summer and Derrick frets about Yorkshire's chances for the rest of the season and everyone is talking and no one is listening and no one minds a bit.

As the night goes on, there will be stories. I will hear for the first time about the hotel room in Stratford, about a transsexual wicket-keeper and a second-team captain who didn't bat and didn't bowl. About the August cup finals at Brondesbury and Stanmore. I will hear about Neil and Leachy and Norman Marine and lives that have been measured out and knitted together by matches and grounds and memories that will mean nothing to anyone who is not sitting round this table.

After tomorrow, there will be no more new stories.

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Against all the odds, we have them on the rack. Six wickets down, still plenty to get. Simon Durban is bowling at full tilt for the first time in years, thundering down the hill and getting it to skid and seam and shoot off the pitch. His back is crumbling, he says, but give it one more over, and we'll see what we can do.

The sun is well past its peak in the sky. Elmley Castle is behind us, with fields and fields beyond. It could not be more perfect. Anthony has had to drive back to London, so I'm keeping wicket. Simon walks back to his mark grimacing, and I clap and shout as I sink into a crouch.

"Let's finish it off, boys. Let's finish it off."

Simon thunders in again, twisting and turning into his delivery stride and grunting from the effort as his front foot hammers down on the turf and the ball fizzes towards the batsman's off stump and it is quick – too quick for the bat – and he gropes at the ball blindly as it catches the outside edge and shoots off low in my direction and I can hear Simon starting to bellow his celebration as the ball goes straight into my gloves. Straight into my gloves and out again.

Were you expecting a happy ending? A heart-warming victory to round everything off? I am sorry to disappoint you – there were plenty of those over the years but, like I said, they are not my stories to tell. And somehow, to end on a win just wouldn't have been right. So we lose the game, divide up the kit bag, clasping favourite bats or pads like lovers parting. And then we shake hands solemnly and drive back to London, sunburnt and shattered.

Tomorrow, we will return to our normal lives and people will ask us about our weekends. And we will want to tell them about everything – to give them some idea of what it all meant. But will they really want to know? And even if they did, how do you explain the death of something to someone who was not part of it while it was alive? What could we say? "This weekend, a chapter of our lives came to a close." Ha! Our friends, they would not understand.

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THE SECRETS OF THE SHOEBOX

John Crace discovers another side to Clyde Walcott

It won't come as a surprise to hear that the highlights of my own dismal cricket career can be re-played on a 15-second memory loop. A loop that might have to be shortened to 12 seconds after I found out earlier this year that the only six I ever hit wasn't actually a six after all.

"You mean the shot you hit into the tree at Turville?" said Euan "Rambo" Ramsay, a geriatric straggler who is still managing to turn out for the Hemingford Hermits, one of the country's poorest cricket teams, long after I discovered my levels of attendance meant that I must have accidentally retired myself.

"Yes, that one."

"That's not a six. The tree is actually inside the boundary and the ground rules are that if the ball hits the tree it's a four."

"But it went right into the very top of the tree."

"Tough," he said. I've seldom seen Rambo look happier.

Without that disputed six, my highlights are left with just a one-handed slip catch and a ball that actually moved off the wicket instead of going straight on and took off stump out of the ground. I don't think it can have been pushed very firmly in, as I was a distinctly medium medium-pacer, but who cares? That's it. Thirty-five years of sporting non-achievement distilled into 12 seconds.

But how much do we actually remember of anyone's playing career? Even the superstars who have made a living out of the game, the cricketers who have spent years in the pursuit of excellence and have clocked up hundreds of Test and ODI appearances between them?

Back in the 1980s, the BBC used to flog two-hour video highlights of individual players. David Gower, Ian Botham, Alan Knott, Sunil Gavaskar… I used to buy them all, even the ones like Ray Illingworth in which I wasn't particularly interested. My memory of that one is blank, though I guess – along with captaining England to an Ashes win Down Under – it must have included a lot of nudges off his hip down to fine leg for a single.

Botham was a world apart. I watched that one video time and again. He was almost exactly the same age as me and he provided the excitement I couldn't bring to my own life. Yet, even with the five wickets on debut and frequent Ashes triumphs, my Botham loop is probably down to about 30 minutes. Or less. The career of England's greatest ever all-rounder reduced to less than one episode of *EastEnders*. Is memory always this fickle? And how do we select which fragments to retain?

This was a question a friend of mine, Pete Haine, found himself asking early last year when his mother Sheila was in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease. Having taken power of attorney over their mother's affairs, Pete, his brothers Tony and Brian, and sister Linda started going through her papers. What Pete found in one shoebox left him amazed.

First there was an advert for pen-friends his mother had placed in a newspaper in 1950 before she had met his father Frank. It read: "Miss Sheila Parkins, 187 Yorkland Avenue, Welling, Kent. Dancing, cycling, stamp-collecting, films, languages. Friends between 17 and 24 anywhere, to whom Miss Parkins will write in English, French or German."

There was no explanation for why she had chosen to keep this advert, though next to it were two letters. The first was dated 30 August 1950 and was sent on headed paper from the County Hotel, Canterbury.

"Dear Miss Parkins, I received a letter from Wilma Clarke the other day asking me to look you up. She is one of your pen pals and I would certainly like to meet you. I notice the address is Welling, Kent and we are staying in Canterbury which is probably not very near. Again, I am playing this match and would not have time to find the address unless you get in touch with me which would make it easier. If you could come down to cricket tomorrow ask them to call me at the main gate and I would get a ticket for you, and meet you at the same time. If you cannot get to cricket, call me on the phone at the County Hotel before 10 o'clock tomorrow morning or if you get the letter this afternoon ring me around dinner time. Hoping to meet you as Wilma had asked me to do so. Cheerio, Clyde Walcott."

A long-time cricket fan, Pete realised the significance. Walcott was one of the legendary Three Ws of West Indian cricket and the letter was a throwback to the historic 1950 tour in which he scored an unbeaten 168 at Lord's as West Indies went on to their first series win in England. Pete turned to the second letter, which was sent from the Kingsley Hotel in London and misdated 6 August 1950. The envelope was postmarked 7 September 1950.

"Hello Sheila, I only received your letter this morning as I left Canterbury before the letter arrived and they had to forward it to me. I realised that Welling was pretty far from Canterbury but I did not know if you were a working girl or not. I am resting this game and travelling to Scarborough on Friday so you can phone me on Friday morning if you receive this letter before then. If not you can drop me a line at the Royal Hotel Scarborough and let me know when I can see you when I arrive back in London on the 16th and leave for home on the 23rd. I would certainly like to meet before I return as Wilma told me so much about you. My phone No at Kingsley is Holborn 3646

so try and ring me on Friday morning so that we could manage something before I return. Cheerio, Clyde."

That was about all there was. "It was tantalising," says Pete. "We didn't know if there had been other letters from Clyde that had been thrown away. The only other thing we found in the box was a photograph of a stunning young black woman that had been signed "Sincerely Wilma". But who Wilma was or where the picture was taken, we had no idea. We presumed she was one of my mum's pen-friends but we couldn't be sure as none of her letters had been kept."

The only person who might have been able to explain everything couldn't as Sheila was by now beyond rational conversation. She died four months later in April 2014, her secret still intact. Pete did later half-recall a conversation he thought he had had with his dad when they were watching TV in the 1960s: "They used to live broadcast the last half-hour of the Tests between 6 and 6.30," he says, "and I would watch it whenever possible. It was in black and white and somehow it always seemed as if Jim Parks was batting. I have this memory of being told my mum had once been taken to tea by Clyde Walcott at the Ritz and then out to the cinema, but it was never mentioned again."

Pete isn't even quite sure if he can trust his own memory. Did his mother go on an innocent date with Clyde Walcott? What did either Sheila or Clyde expect from it? What was the importance of Wilma? Why had Sheila kept these letters so carefully for so long without ever telling anyone about them? If she had kept them just as a souvenir of the time she went out for tea with one of the most famous cricketers of his generation, how come she never told anyone in the next 65 years? It's the kind of family story you'd expect to be told and retold.

The only other person who could have shed some light on this is Clyde Walcott himself and he died in 2006. Clyde married a woman called Muriel Ashby the year after he got back from that England tour in 1951. Did he ever mention Wilma or Sheila to her? Were his brushes with Sheila and Wilma something or nothing? For a professional cricketer on an international tour, he certainly seemed to go to great lengths to secure a meeting with Sheila. His persistence and attention to detail in making sure he could be contacted suggest something rather than more than a casual politeness. It seems to have mattered a great deal to him that they should meet up.

The letters don't just offer a glimpse into an almost-lost world in which letter-writing was as much a symbol of patience and reserve as it was of passion. More than that, they take us into the private world of someone we only know publicly. While the rest of England was focused on the achievements of the big-hitting West Indian wicket-keeper batsman, his mind was – at least part of the time – just as pre-occupied with his personal life. Being a cricketer was just something he did for a living. And who knows? When Sir Clyde looked back on his life in old age, maybe it wasn't just his achievements on the cricket pitch that gave him pleasure. Maybe those, too, had been condensed into his own private half-hour show-reel. And maybe, somewhere on another memory loop, there were still a few seconds and some warm smiles left for Sheila and Wilma.

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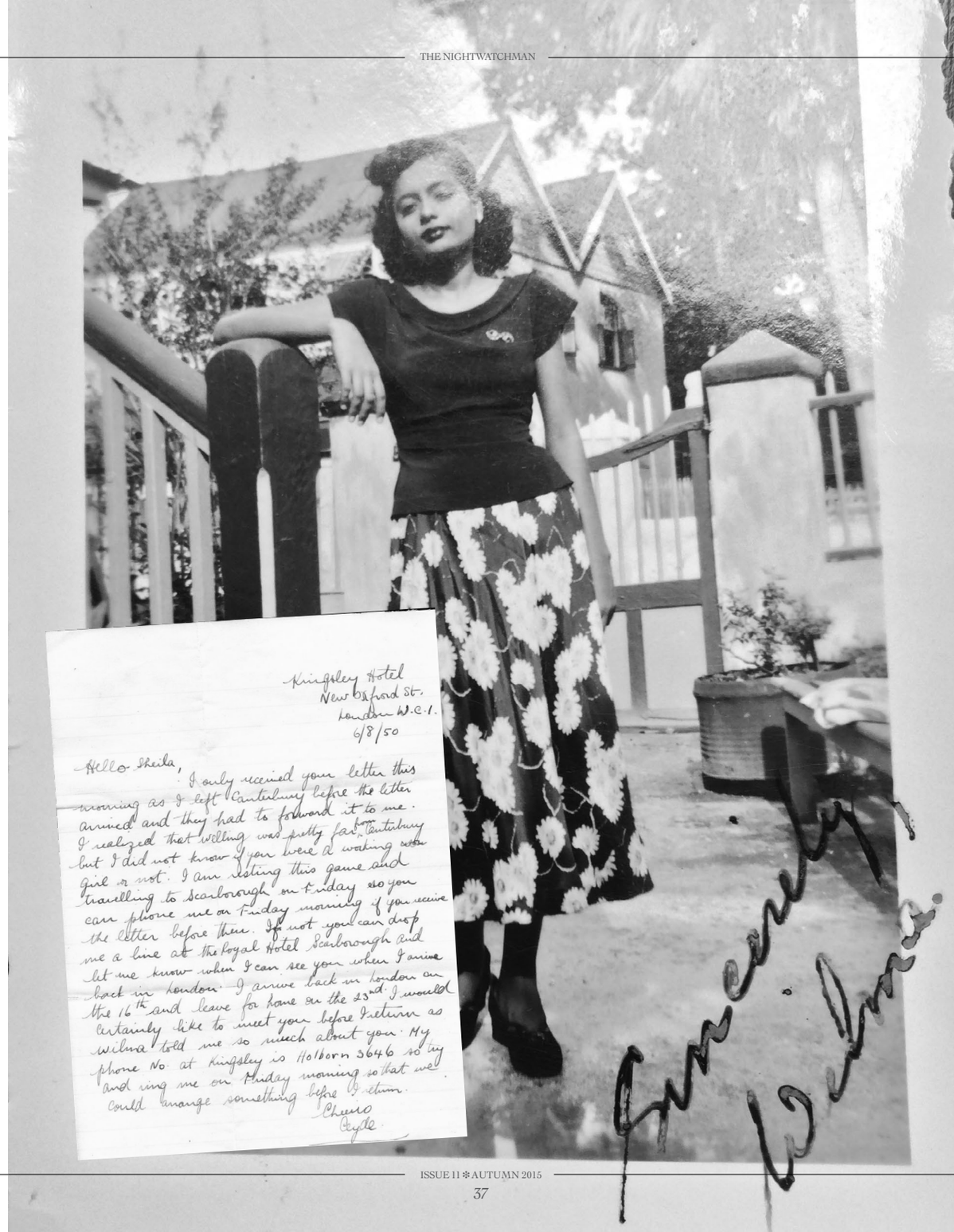

FROM LORD'S TO THE SKIDDAW

Paul Edwards on Francis Thompson and his Cricket

It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though my own red roses there may blow;
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk,
Though the red roses crest the caps, I know.
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro:
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!

It is the cricket poem remembered by those who have had only the briefest experience of the game. "Oh my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!" they chant, before getting misty-eyed in the moment. If you go into any club pavilion in Lancashire, there is a fair chance you will find a framed copy of Francis Thompson's "A Rhapsodist at Lord's" on the wall, or an anthology including it on the sparsely-stocked bookshelf, or someone leaning on the bar and keen to recite it. It would be no surprise at all if the MCC's souvenir shop were selling tea-towels, bedspreads and bath-mats with the poem's most famous stanza embroidered upon them. Almost 137 years after the match that it chiefly recalls, those run-stealers are flickering still.

Lines have been borrowed from the poem by other cricket writers: Gerard Martineau entitled his 1946 book of portraits *The Field is Full of Shades*; Leslie Duckworth's *Holmes and Sutcliffe* is subtitled *The Run Stealers*; and Eric Midwinter called his excellent history of Lancashire CCC *Red Roses Crest The Caps*. Nor is it only specialists who remain in thrall to the poem: it is quoted in the second volume of Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*; lines from "At Lord's" are recalled by Antonia Fraser in her memoir *My History*; and that first stanza is one of the epigraphs for Anthony Quinn's novel *Half of the Human Race*. A scholarly monograph could be written detailing references to those most famous lines; within a few months it would be out of date.

Part of the reason for the continued popularity of Thompson's great poem — perhaps great stanza would be more accurate — is that, to borrow Ronald Mason's phrase, the poet "tapped once and for all some of the innermost springs of a universal nostalgia". Rather like George Beldam's wondrous photograph of Victor Trumper about to drive a ball at The Oval, "At Lord's" captures something both specific and timeless. Beldam's photograph was very probably taken in 1902 and is still seen as the classic image of cricket's Golden Age. It has retained its sense of grace and incipient power into the 21st century and seems likely to do so as long as the game is played. Similarly, Thompson's poem, written in the early years of the 20th century and recalling the 1878 Lancashire v Gloucestershire match at Old Trafford, expresses the emotions of those still rapt by the beautiful magic of the figures in white. The ground could be anywhere and the standard of play is irrelevant. We can all remember our own run-stealers and weep a little for their passing. "Such a mood imports a new note into cricket poetry," observed EV Lucas in his 1908 *Cornhill Magazine* article on Thompson's verse about the game. "Cricket poetry hitherto has been descriptive, reflective, rapturous, gay, humorous. It has never before to my knowledge been made a vehicle for a lament for the past of profoundest melancholy."

In one respect, of course, the poem can be pinned down not just to a specific game but to a particular pair of batsmen. The famous refrain yearns for Lancashire's AN Hornby and RG Barlow, one of the first great opening partnerships in the history of county cricket; how handy for those wanting to adapt the line to their own recollections that both batsmen's surnames had two syllables. Thus Thompson's closing flourish can be transported easily across time and oceans: Oh my Woodfull and my Ponsford, my Hutton and my Washbrook, my Barlow and my Richards, and so on. In time, very recent cricketers will take their places on the list.

That is probably enough for now about cricket's most quotable piece of literature. Those wanting further analysis of Thompson's poem can do little better than read Mason's perceptive article about it in his fine 1967 collection *Sing All A Green Willow*. Therein they will also find a crisp summary of the poet's life from his birth in Preston in 1859 to his opium-hastened death from consumption at the Catholic Hospital of Saint John and Saint Elizabeth a few hundred yards from Lord's in 1907. Previous biographers had already recorded what they saw as the chief events in Thompson's brief life: his rejection for the priesthood in 1877; his repeated failure to pass his medical examinations; his move to London in 1885 and his years on the streets; his vital friendship with Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, in whose journal, *Merry England*, Thompson was first published; his nearly two decades living a precarious literary life, punctuated by periods of recuperation from illness and addiction at Catholic retreats in North Wales and on the Sussex Downs, his later years, often lived out in modest lodgings in North London and his devotion to Roman Catholicism; his religious poetry, which caused his

name to be noticed in literary circles and his work to be admired by GK Chesterton among many others; his congenital inability to organise his life. All this would be fascinating, even if the gentle poet had known only Divine Grace and never encountered the bearded variety.

Yet there is a little more to Thompson's cricket than a match he could not bear to watch and another he could not bear to remember. Although lines from "At Lord's" work their strong, strange magic in any consideration of Thompson's cricket writing, more has been discovered about their author since Mason's book was published or, indeed, since John Arlott described the Prestonian as a "sad, misty Lancastrian figure" in 1975. The scholar most responsible for clearing the haze is Brigid Boardman, whose 1988 biography *Between Heaven and Charing Cross* was followed by a new edition of the poems in 2002. Thanks to Boardman's work, those unable to consult Thompson's manuscripts at Boston College, Massachusetts can read this from one of his notebooks:

I attained a considerable critical apprehension of the supreme English game by watching the play of its finest masters; while I was assisted, no little, to perceive something of its own technique by my own practical experience as a zealous, if necessarily occasional and trumpery amateur. A local match on a Saturday afternoon will open a youth's eyes to the merits of a Wyatt or a Barlow… Knowing the ordinary difficulties he can appreciate with a new vividness the extraordinary difficulties, and the extraordinary skill which meets them, in the great players he watches. So, not presuming to call himself a cricketer, he becomes a connoisseur in cricketers: at least within certain modest limits. Such is my case. For several years, living within distance of O[ld] T[rafford] Ground, where successively played each year the chief cricketers of England…

As so often, the ellipses are tantalising and we await the results of another researcher's visit. Still, what we have tells a little more about Thompson's experience of the game and establishes that his cricketing knowledge was not only based on his afternoons at Old Trafford between 1877 and 1884 when he should have been reading medicine at Owens College. We know, for example, that he played the game and not only as a child with his sister Mary. In August 1901 Thompson even arranged a game in London which, so he told his friend and first biographer, Everard Meynell, had been his first for over 18 years, thus suggesting that he may also have played the game when posing as a medical student. It might have been wise for a qualified doctor to have been available when Thompson made his comeback, for he informed Meynell that he had received "a trimmer on the knee-cap (causing it to swell), and a beautiful ball on my left temple, which cannoned off a yard or two behind the wicket."

Plainly Thompson did not leave cricket behind in 1885 when he took the train to London with little more than Blake's poems and the plays of Aeschylus in his possession. Some broad themes in the course of his often-wretched life had already been set and one of them was an abiding love of cricket.

Over the next 20 years, a variety of friends and acquaintances, many of them with their minds on more spiritual matters, were to record how Thompson would discuss the county scores with interest and discernment. HA Hinkson, a friend of the Meynells, accompanied Thompson on a train journey to Chester in 1892 and found him to be "very human" when chatting about cricket and other sports. Perhaps Hinkson's slight surprise was prompted by his knowledge that the poet was eventually heading for Pantasaph to recuperate from ill health caused by his taking opium and living on the streets. During his long stay in North Wales, fellow Catholics would engage Thompson in discussion of cricket styles and the latest county scores. "The difference," writes Boardman, "was that whereas to Francis these were matters worthy of attention in their own right, for the rest they were means of leading him on to more exalted topics."

In London his favourite pub in the last decade of his life was the Skiddaw near his lodgings in Elgin Avenue. The landlord reserved a place for Thompson by the fire and the poet contentedly discussed the county scores with other lodgers and drinkers. But we must be careful not to picture him finally discovering any routine for his life. Thompson remained capable of turning up to appointments days late or early; opium-addicted and eccentric beyond affectation, he did little more than manage to get by at best. Sometimes even that was beyond him. He inspired the love of his friends and also their exasperation. The most touching pen-portrait was written by his godson Francis Meynell:

I… remember him with the tolerant-critical memory of a boy of 16 who took his poetry on trust, and with it the untied bootlaces, the overcoat never taken off, the collar much too big… the smoke issuing from a smouldering pipe in the pocket almost as often as from his mouth, a delighted companionship in the Stop Press cricket scores, the elder-brother feeling that… I… could not fail to have for this dear misfit of a man, this absurdly and absorbedly kind comrade; a jack-in-the-box whose comings and goings were always so unexpected because he never knew the time, often not the day, and so was always chasing and never catching the calendar.

There were other cricket poems, too. Or, rather, there were unfinished poems, some of which Thompson may have wanted to complete later and polish up for publication, although the consensus seems to be that most were written simply for the poet's own satisfaction. The most well known and anthologised is the "Rime O'Bat of O My Sky-Em", a parody of Edward Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam", but Boardman's Poems also includes the complete "Middlesex v Yorkshire: May 28-31, 1899", a narrative written in couplets and recounting the famous game in which Albert Trott's 164 and nine wickets steered the home side to an innings victory against a Championship-devouring Yorkshire team. None of Thompson's five other cricket poems come close to "At Lord's" as far as quality is concerned yet the Middlesex v Yorkshire verse reveals his control of narrative and a gentle sense of humour as it describes Trott's demolition of Yorkshire's attack:

West-end tent or pavilion-rail,
He lashes them home with a thresher's flail.
Says Hawke: "I would give the half I've got
To him who made yon devil's bird Trott!"

The other poems also show that Thompson's knowledge of the game and its leading players was formidable. "Rime O'Bat" is littered with references to famous Hambledonians and county cricketers of relatively limited fame. And all this came not from someone writing in a library lined with *Wisdens* and *Lillywhites*, but from a poet who apparently possessed no more than a bagful of books in his life and had to rely on his prodigious memory. There is lyricism and, more surprisingly perhaps, a sense of Northern solidarity in Thompson's less well-known cricket poetry. Who would have thought that the Preston man who looked back with a love and grief only he could express to his afternoons watching Hornby and Barlow at Old Trafford, could also write this stanza in "Dies Irae, Dies Illa"?

Woe is me, fair White Rose!
It is a bitter stead,
That thou should'st
fall to false Southron,
And not to thy Sister Red!

In the other two poems, "The little Red Rose shall be pale at last" and "Sons, who have sucked stern nature forth", Thompson returns to his Lancastrian theme and to an elegiac tone:

The little Red Rose shall be pale at last,
Who made it red but the June wind's sigh?
And Brearley's ball that he bowls so fast?
It shall sink in the dust of late July!

Everard Meynell wrote in his 1913 biography that the stanza above was one of three composed one night as Thompson was travelling through Marylebone on his way back to his lodgings from the Meynells' home, the whole poem being posted back to his host a few hours later. The lines were, perhaps, written almost as a thank-you note for hospitality and the poetry is intended as shared enjoyment between friends. Nonetheless, that symbol of the little red rose and the plangent tone as summer passes are entirely recognisable as Thompson's own.

For Francis Thompson cricket was a consistent thread in a life that frequently unravelled. He seems to have discussed it whenever he could, he wrote a perceptive review of Ranjitsinhji's *Jubilee Book of Cricket* in 1897 and he even played a few games, although on one occasion — couldn't you guess? —he forgot his pads. Boardman suggests persuasively that Thompson's enthusiasm for the game, and also, curiously, for "some aspects of warfare", can be explained by a limited fondness for order. "In both cases," she argues, "it was the ritual, the pattern and the movement, that appealed to him." Those qualities are also, of course, to be found in the rites of the Roman Catholic Church and, in a rather different form, in the rhythms and disciplines of English poetry.

And together, his faith, his verse and his cricket were to help Thompson cope with the regular chaos that frequently comprised his daily existence. As he sat watching Hornby and Barlow accumulate their runs at Old Trafford, he could, perhaps, forget the priestly vocation for which he had been rejected and the medical career for which, since he was averse to both surgery and systematic study, he was plainly unfitted. He probably had little idea how he was to cope with the rest of his life. When he took that train to London in 1885 it was, so he wrote, "without hope, and with the gloomiest forebodings, in the desperate spirit of an enfant perdue". But on those afternoons at Old Trafford, there were four balls in the over, runs on the board and a sense of peace. Perhaps it was no wonder that Thompson was tortured by the remembrance of it all; but perhaps it was almost inevitable that he could not forget it either.

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THE MAGIC NUMBER

Simon Barnes charts the game's seven plots

You will be familiar with the idea that there are only seven basic plots available to the story-teller. And you may well have read Christopher Booker's heroic and brilliant attempt to tell us what these plots actually are, in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*.

You will be less familiar with my own much-repeated contention that sport is living mythology: a series of archetypal tales that unfold before us in different guises every day of our sporting lives.

I have followed sport across time and space for most of a professional lifetime and there have been moments – on solitary nights in Holiday Inns, in the midst of frenzied key-stabbing during floodlit football matches, during gymnastics and super-heavyweight weightlifting – when I have wondered what the bloody hell I'm doing it for.

And more pertinently, why the bloody stuff still enthrals me. After all, I could be reading *The Odyssey* or *Hamlet*. But the fact is that sport, too, goes deep. It goes deep because, time and again, it repeats our most ancient tales and reconnects us with one of the things that defines our humanity: we tell stories. We are a species of fabulists and that is why sport is a fabulous thing.

You are going to find some plots more often than others – in sport you are more likely to come across conflict than true love, for example – but if sport really is a living mythology, it must bring us these seven archetypal kinds of story again and again and again.

Booker says that stories constitute "a hidden universal language". He says that "there is literally no story in the world that cannot be seen in this light." So I wondered if I could find all seven of Booker's plots in cricket.

1. OVERCOMING THE MONSTER

Here is Beowulf battling with Grendel and then with Grendel's still more fearsome mother; here is James Bond against Ernst Stavro Blofeld. The hero of such a story must take on a creature that is often frighteningly ugly, and more importantly is physically and morally wrong. He faces this challenge, often against impossible odds, usually by way of a miraculous escape – the ski-run! The toboggan! – until by the end it is clear that life has triumphed over death.

David Steele

Many of these overcoming-the-monster stories stem from the obscurity, the utter unlikeliness of the hero: David, the shepherd boy, takes on Goliath and becomes king. Steele was plucked from Northamptonshire at the age of 33, spectacled and grey-haired, to face Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson, who had boasted of their delight in hitting batsmen in those pre-helmet days.

Steele came out to bat with a gentle imperturbable courage, and if England lost the actual cricket matches, they showed that they could at least find a hero capable of subduing the most terrifying monsters in cricket. The following summer Steele took on the first great West Indies pace quartet – and then he was dropped. Never played again. He played eight Tests in his life, against the best fast bowlers of all time, and if England lost, Steele himself was unconquered.

2. RAGS TO RICHES

Here is the plot that drives *Cinderella, My Fair Lady, David Copperfield* and *Dick Whittington*. It generally involves a young person, often a child who is overlooked, disregarded, unhappy. Things turn around and start to go very well. But then there is a central crisis when all seems lost. Finally things are set aright and we can all live happily ever after

Shane Warne

This is a plot told again and again in sport: a boy steps from the ghetto and becomes champion of the world, or a boy from Bowral spends his childhood hitting a golf ball with a cricket stump against the wall of his house and becomes the greatest cricketer that ever picked up a bat.

Warne tells the story as well as any. He was a talented scapegrace, a ne'er-do-well of whom teachers despaired, forever skipping practice to gorge on pizza and beer. But he pulled himself together, made the Test team – and then hit a crisis. He finished with figures of 1 for 150 and a couple of matches later he was dropped. But he was recalled against West Indies, went on to England for the 1993 series – and bowled the Ball of the Century to Mike Gatting. From then on there was no stopping him.

3. THE QUEST

Here is the plot of *Lord of the Rings, Watership Down* and *The Odyssey*. It generally begins with a call to action, and this is followed by a series of terrible ordeals and thrilling escapes, often with a group of companions. It ends with a great renewal of life: Odysseus back with faithful Penelope, the dark forces of Sauron utterly destroyed, the rabbits safe at last.

Flintoff 2005

The Quest is a plot that can be found in any series or, for that matter, any sporting encounter. It is about the attempt to get through an arduous task to achieve impossible victory, and it is fundamental to sport. Every cup run recapitulates The Quest. And it is a plot beautifully delineated in the story of England in 2005, when Andrew Flintoff and his loyal companions set out to right the wrongs of 18 years and win back the greatest treasure their world can offer.

The five Test matches of that series provided as many ordeals and escapes as even the most avid follower could bear: first a defeat, followed by an unlikely victory, then a draw when it seemed England would never make their advantage tell, moving on to the fraught win in the fourth Test and, finally, the unforgettable denouement at The Oval.

Perhaps it should have been Flintoff who played that final devastating innings, though it was actually Kevin Pietersen who saved the day. Real sport will often avoid the obvious, and that often makes for a better narrative. Still, Flintoff hit 72 in the first innings and then had a five-fer; he did well enough. Story-book stuff, people said, but it was better than that. It was sport.

4. VOYAGE AND RETURN

This is a plot in which the new world that gets visited is the real star. It's Lilliput and Brobdingnag that matter, not Gulliver. Booker offers other examples like the *Alice* books and *Robinson Crusoe*. He also suggests *Brideshead Revisited*, in which the travelling is social rather than geographical. Often, the hero is not much changed by his adventures, returning to his own land no more than a little bemused. The plot tends to involve arrival, fascination, frustration and a relieved homecoming.

Graeme Hick

Hick made a voyage to the strange land of international cricket. He is a typical hero of such stories: nice, unassuming, a trifle dense, full of good nature: an everyman. His journey was made possible by the talent he showed in his home environment, the County Championship and the little cricket ground at Worcester: a small-town boy making good.

But Test cricket was not what he hoped it would be. He did his best in a voyage full of stormy waters, but in the end it seemed a kindness when he was taken back to his home port after 65 matches, six centuries and an average of 31. He returned to Worcester and carried on as if he had never set out on his journey, ending up with more than 40,000 first-class runs.

5. COMEDY

Comedy is not simply funny. In a proper comedy plot everything goes horribly wrong, but it always ends with the world set to right again: Jack shall have Jill, nought shall go ill, the man shall have his mare again and all shall be well. Comedy is essentially about the passage from darkness into light: the sundered lovers are reunited, the stern parent relents, a period of confusion and nightmare is resolved and the whole world is made happy. It is the most contrived plot of them all: and perhaps the most satisfying to its audience.

South Africa at the World Cup

Comedy is the hardest plot to shoehorn into a cricketing context, not least because of the absence of Jills in the men's game, along with the excess of Jacks. The best I can manage is a half-plot: one that is still awaiting its resolution, its happy ending, its celebration of the joyous continuation of life.

South Africa's World Cup performances have brought us a series of incidents reminiscent of PG Wodehouse or Georges Feydeau. Farce can be defined as a situation of despair for the characters that is wonderfully amusing to the audience. But that despair needs to be followed by a final scene of rejoicing, embracing and champagne.

South Africa were the fall guys in 1992 when a rain regulation gave them a target of 21 off one ball, then four years on they suicidally dropped Allan Donald for the quarter-final against West Indies. Then came the 1999 classic when Donald ran batless towards his doom of a run-out. This was followed by Shaun Pollock's Duckworth-Lewis miscalculation in 2003 that ensured his team were knocked out.

We still need one final chapter in which everything is put to rights, but at least South Africa have demonstrated that cricket can do farce as well as any other kind of plot.

6. TRAGEDY

These days we use the word "tragic" to mean "extremely sad". That is not tragedy in the technical sense of the term. The death of Phillip Hughes was a terrible accident and desperately sad, but it wasn't a tragedy in the sense that *Macbeth* or *Oedipus Rex* are tragedies.

Tragedy requires a flawed hero. He usually steps beyond the normal boundaries of behaviour, violating some ancient prohibition – at first to find immense success, but then, as a point of no return is passed, he moves on to his inevitable doom.

Sport is not supposed to be a life-and-death matter, so sporting tragedies must involve symbolic rather than literal deaths. Cricket is based around a life–death metaphor, so every innings has tragic potential; everyone who has ever batted knows that. Here is a tale that conforms pretty closely to the laws of tragedy laid down by Aristotle.

Douglas Jardine

Jardine – like Doctor Faustus, like Macbeth, like Icarus – was an over-reacher. He took on the greatest cricketer that ever drew breath and won. But his strength of will and his single-minded pursuit of victory led to disaster.

In the Bodyline series of 1932–33, England won, Sir Donald Bradman and Australia were defeated and all seemed marvellously well. But the manner of the victory, in which Jardine stepped outside the accepted limits of sporting behaviour, came close destroying the civilisation of his sport. His victory was

more terrible than any defeat could possibly have been.

Jardine created an impossible burden for English cricket. The establishment did what the establishment always does: outwardly backing him while inwardly shafting him. In the end Jardine resigned – "falling on his sword", if you like, a cliché that stresses the story's tragic shape. Jardine was a tragic hero: perhaps we should refer to Bodyline as "The Scottish Series".

7. REBIRTH

This is a plot in which the hero passes from darkness into light; a classic example is *A Christmas Carol*. Here is a story in which things go desperately wrong, in which darkness seems to have triumphed, only for redemption to strike at the last moment, with death conquered and life triumphant. Often the hero himself is the dark figure of the story, but his victory over himself ensures the happy ending.

Ian Botham

This is still regarded as one of cricket's classic tales, and it is celebrated because it marries so closely with this ancient and archetypal plot. Here we have a young hero, bold, devil-may-care and swashbuckling, a man of apparently superhuman powers and a wholly unnatural degree of luck. But everything goes badly wrong. He is made captain, but he can't win a match. His own form deserts him. He becomes hag-ridden by self-doubt and resigns as captain.

Then a wise old man comes along to give advice and this breaks the spell of despair. Under the captaincy of Mike Brearley we find Botham Unbound: and he reels off three successive match-winning performances. Victory is assured, the dragon is slain, peace, happiness and prosperity are assured.

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There are many excellent reasons for enjoying sport, and many reasons why a trivial and unimportant activity like sport has so much meaning for those of us under the spell of its mythology. As I made this list for cricket I jotted down examples from all the other sporting events I have covered: and the list marches on and on and on. Lance Armstrong as tragic hero? Tiger Woods? Gazza? Muhammad Ali?

"Blast the sports pages," wrote Marshall McLuhan, "creators of pickled gods and archetypes." But our appetite for pickled gods and archetypes has never waned, because it is part of being human. Sport retells these ancient tales in an ever-renewing form, filling the back half of our newspapers every day of our lives. Sport reaches into that deep part of ourselves that demands stories to explain the world: to help us to enjoy life more fully and to endure it more steadfastly.

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GOLD RUSH

Alex Massie watches the wheel come around

The problem with nostalgia, so often deemed the "English disease", is that it blinds us to the glories of the present; the problem with celebrating the present too strongly is that it breeds an impatience with the past. Navigating our way between these shoals is rarely easy, yet it brings its own reward. For we may more fully gain a proper appreciation of the present by considering the past.

And yet, despite that, the temptation to preserve the old times in rosy aspic remains almost irresistible. Particularly, I would suggest, when the subject of that preservation is cricket. As JB Priestley put it: "I cannot believe that there is another game in the world that releases so many floods of nostalgic reminiscence".

Indeed not. Yet the two series played in England this summer, the first against Brendon McCullum's admirable and gallant New Zealanders, the more astonishing second against Michael Clarke's hapless Australians, underline something all too easily forgotten: this is a Golden Age for cricket – and one, moreover, that bears comparison with the original Golden Age that ended a century ago.

All eras have their heroes and all decades their significant moments but these past 15 years, I think, can stand beside any other period in the game's history. Lara, Tendulkar, Ponting, Kallis, Warne, Muralitharan, McGrath, Steyn, Sangakkara: these, and so many others, are names to be recalled when we are old and grey, our future Hornbys and Barlows of long ago.

Each age is different, but far from the slightest of cricket's glories is the manner in which, with a bit of trimming here and nudging there, the game maintains a surprising degree of continuity between one era and another. History may only rarely repeat itself exactly but echoes from the past can still be heard in our own time. It would, plainly, be silly to suggest that this present Golden Age has all the same characteristics and qualities of that first Golden Age but there remains, nonetheless, sufficient evidence to make a convincing case that many "new" things are simply old things refreshed and refashioned for the modern age.

It is, of course, all too tempting to look back at that first Golden Age as a kind of prelapsarian paradise untouched by sin. This owes much to what one might term the *ante hoc propter hoc* fallacy – that is, because the horrors of the First World War brought an abrupt and shattering end to the Golden Age, everything that preceded it should be understood as nobler, simpler, more virtuous, better and so on.

In fact, the original Golden Age – the era of Trumper and Hill, Ranji and Fry, MacLaren and Rhodes, Trumble and Noble, Barnes and Jessop and so many others – was the birth of modern cricket. It was a tumultuous era of rapid advancement from which everything since flowed. This was the game's first period of globalisation; a time when new styles of batting and mysterious new forms of bowling were developed. A time when players and administrators were frequently at loggerheads. Above all it was an era of aggressive, dashing cricket, perhaps the most aggressive and dashing until our own time. A time, in short, in which modern cricket was both born and reinvented. In other words, a period not so different from our own.

If the pitches in the original Golden Age might horrify modern batsmen, it remains sensible to suppose that the greats of our time would – had they been brought up in the circumstances of that earlier era – found a way to master the conditions and their contemporaries alike. In similar fashion, who dares suggest Victor Trumper could not have thrived in the modern game?

Be that as it may, Neville Cardus, noting the improvements in pitches, observed that in Edwardian England: "The circumstances so much favoured batsmanship that the technique of stroke-play and footwork developed at a pace which outran and outwitted every bowler not of the highest class". If scores were, on the whole, lower in Test cricket then than they are today, it remains the case that run rates of nearly four an over were far from unknown. The torpor which afflicted so much cricket in the 1960s was unknown in pre-1914 England. Today's flat pitches might be of a different nature to Trent Bridge or The Oval then but they have had the same effect: only bowlers of the highest class have a hope.

Even so, as this summer's rollercoaster Ashes demonstrated, modern batsmen still struggle when something other than a batting paradise is provided for them. Three of the last eight Tests played in England have finished inside three days – a throwback, if you will, to the Golden Age when English Tests, on uncovered wickets, were only allotted three days. Over rates were swifter then, of course, but it is striking how Tests were of much the same duration then as now. This summer's Ashes Tests have lasted 326, 325, 214 and 175 overs respectively. By comparison, the three Tests unaffected by rain in

the immortal 1902 series lasted for 259, 296 and 310 overs respectively.

Gilbert Jessop's innings at The Oval that summer – still the fastest Test century recorded by an Englishman – spurred Cardus to write: "This innings by Jessop had immortal longings; it will never be forgotten. The vision, the undying chivalry of it, belong not only to cricket but to the unwritten saga of the English people; less worthy themes have served the bardic strain." This might be thought coming it a trifle high but can anyone really doubt that England's performance at Trent Bridge this summer, when they dismissed the old adversary for 60 in just 18.3 overs, will be remembered forever too?

Elsewhere other echoes from the past seem uncanny precursors to our own revolutions. This was, thanks to Barton King and George Hirst, the age of swerve and, after Bosanquet, the first proper stirrings of leg spin. The modern development of reverse swing and the doosra are simply variations on an ancient theme. Similarly, the development of the reverse sweep and the Dilscoop advance the art of batsmanship in comparable fashion to Ranji's pioneering leg glance. These have changed the game yet, paradoxically, the game remains the same.

Other controversies seem just as contemporary. When CB Fry was called for throwing in 1898, Sydney Pardon, editor of *Wisden*, declared this was no more than "long-delayed justice". In 1901 Jim Phillips, "called" Arthur Mold 16 times in 10 overs, effectively ending that great stalwart's career. The Imperial Cricket Conference, founded in 1909 and the precursor to our own ICC, did not have to rule on "compliant" actions but the question of what is – and more pertinently what is not – a legal delivery is as old as the game itself.

Today's stars endure an impossible schedule, forever crossing the globe and living from suitcases. Yet their cricketing ancestors endured equally demanding schedules. The 1909 touring Australians played 37 first-class matches that summer, for instance. Meanwhile, in the Edwardian era no sooner had one English tour of Australia ended than both teams would catch the same boat back to England for the resumption of hostilities just a few months later. Cricket never quite slept then either.

Sometimes even the players thought it too much. In 1905 Archie MacLaren complained that English players were disadvantaged by the gruelling structure of the County Championship and, not for the last time, it was claimed that the Australians benefited from their smaller, more concentrated, first-class programme.

The Edwardian age was also the moment when the game became properly international. South Africa were granted Test status and, though it was ruined by rain in a desperate summer, the 1912 triangular tournament was still the first attempt to organise a genuine Test match championship.

That summer was notable for something else, too: the conflict in Australia between administrators and players. Who would control

selection for the visit to England and who would manage the team? Would the players continue to choose their own manager (and divide the tour's receipts amongst themselves) or would the board assert its new-found prerogatives? Trouble had been brewing for some time, made manifest by the manner in which Clem Hill, the Australian captain, came to blows with another selector during the 1911–12 Australian summer. In the event, six players, including Hill and Trumper, boycotted the 1912 tour to England. The West Indian board's struggle to hold onto its players in the era of instant IPL riches is merely the latest encounter in this age-old, recurring, struggle

Then, as now, however, cricket was spreading its wings. The first West Indian side to tour England arrived in 1900 and another, though still not granted Test status, followed in 1906. An All India XI visited in 1911, sowing seeds that would eventually blossom much later when India joined the Test fraternity. Other flowers bloomed but only briefly, notably the Philadelphians, led by King, who were both regular visitors to England and regular hosts to English and Australian teams in their own land.

Today cricket has another choice to make. Does it continue to expand the game – to Afghanistan, Ireland, the UAE and who knows where else – or does it stick with what it has? Does cricket's globalisation continue or will our recent internationalisation, like the poor Philadelphians, be but a passing fad? Here again, it may be that the past has something to tell the present.

Everything changes but much remains the same. The wheel turns, always. Pitches may be less variable than they were in the first Golden Age but the game itself maintains its infinite variety. Some ancient ideas may even make a comeback. It is not impossible, for instance, that specialist wicket-keepers will make a comeback, at least in Twenty20 cricket. There the value of a smart catch or a sharp stumping must soon outweigh questions over how many runs a gloveman might make coming in at No.8 or 9.

Similarly, batting orders may in the future be rejigged mid-match to take advantage of certain conditions. A hitter might, for instance, be promoted to capitalise on tired bowling with an old ball at the end of the day much as, in earlier times, batting orders might be reversed the better to give time for a wet pitch to dry and lose its demons.

Indeed, I cannot have been the only person watching the carnage at Trent Bridge this summer who wondered, as Australia subsided to 33 for 7 after nine overs, if Michael Clarke might have been better off declaring then, the better to have a crack at England while conditions for seam bowling were at their best. No doubt that was an imaginative fancy too far, but that it could even be contemplated further strengthens the notion that all things always remain possible in this most infinite of games.

Above all, however, this has been an age of revolutionary change and wonder that, in cricket's typically

paradoxical fashion, harks back to an earlier age of rapid change and awe. This, like the first Golden Age, is a time of heroes. Amidst all the uncertainty and justified concern about cricket's future it is worth taking a moment to pause and reflect upon the wonders of our own time even as we acknowledge that few things are actually as wholly new as first they seem. The past can still inform the present and the golden thread connecting that first age of splendour to our own is stronger and thicker than many assume.

"I have been here before," says Charles Ryder at the beginning of *Brideshead Revisited*, "on a cloudless day in June, when the ditches were creamy with meadowsweet and the air heavy with the scents of summer; it was a day of peculiar splendour, and though I had been there so often, in so many moods, it was to that first visit that my heart returned on this, my latest." As with Mr Ryder, so with cricket. The more things change, the more they seem uncannily familiar and the stirrings of one golden age can be found in another, long ago.

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HAND IN GLOVE: A WICKETKEEPER'S TALE

Robert Kitson on 42 years of crouching

It will soon be time. I can feel it, tugging at me like some inexorable ebb tide. The mind is still willing – oh so willing – but the body doth protest too much. At some stage it will no longer be possible to ignore the distress signals. Wicket-keeping is a bit like sex: what used to come naturally now takes days, if not weeks, to recover from. Age shall not weary them etc, but whoever wrote those words clearly never spent 42 years behind the stumps.

As I type this, just about everything hurts. I played a leisurely 20-over game last night: nothing serious, good fun. Even that almost killed me. The base of my third finger feels puffy and swollen, my middle fingers are bony curves. I can still click my right thumb where John Downing broke it with his quicker ball at Middleton-on-Sea. My left calf feels as if a donkey has kicked it and my right Achilles has been playing up for a decade. Bending over – "Tight? I'll show you tight" – is akin to Russian roulette with mother nature holding the revolver. What is going to twang next? How far away seem those gloriously supple years when one-handed catches were almost routine rather than completely out of the question.

Hence the sudden urge to write something down, to bare my creaking stumper's soul. I cannot be the only mediocre club cricketer to have measured much of his life in irrelevant, barely-noticed triumphs: smooth leg-side takes and half-volley pick-ups on village fields that no one else appreciated, the odd reflex chance that improbably stuck. Somewhere amid all the velvety glovework and cool efficiency – okay, endless byes and innumerable fumbles – there must be a few splinters of wisdom for future generations.

Perhaps we should start with wicket-keeping gloves. Kids, you don't know you're born. Soon there will be only a few of us old enough to remember the days of gauntlets and buckles (yes, really), when you could pretty much judge a person's outlook on life by whether they preferred Alan Knott's Slazenger red or Bob Taylor's Mitre blue. I have owned perhaps six pairs of wicket-keeping gloves in my life and developed a closer relationship with them than with some family pets. People think Jack Russell was weird, endlessly repairing his trustiest bits of kit. Trust me, he was never as fixated by pimpled rubber as I was.

Now keepers seem to change their gloves almost every series, like tennis players with bags stuffed full of rackets. These dream-catchers are soft and supple and no longer have to have their palms bashed endlessly with bat handles to break them in. Their pads – if they even bother wearing them outside their trousers – are gossamer-light and are basically glorified shin-pads. I'd like to see today's youngsters learn to keep wicket like we did: with men's batting pads brushing the chest, gloves like iron and nil tuition. The only bespoke keeper training I ever had was standing beneath a series of towering high balls – this was 1982 – whacked skywards by a world-weary ex-pro in an Essex second XI sweater. When I got dropped from my school first XI, a week before my A-Levels, in favour of a raw but promising 16-year-old, it felt as if the bottom of my universe had fallen out. The subsequent three-and-a-half decades have been an attempt to stick the pieces back together.

Here's something else they never tell you when you're a teenager; you will be a better wicket-keeper in your late 20s and your 30s than you are now. Stick around and you acquire stuff like patience and concentration, invaluable skills for keepers that are not necessarily there from day one. Your reflexes may not improve indefinitely but your ability to anticipate will. If you spend years keeping at a particular ground – particularly if the pitch has a bit of bounce – to the same bowlers you will become better still. And if you are really, really lucky you will reach nirvana. Albeit temporarily, the ball will start to melt into the gloves and strange things suddenly become possible. I mention this only to emphasis that cricketing miracles can happen, but there are few better feelings in sport than a leg-side stumping standing up to a medium pacer. To say I regularly recall one memorable example (in the first over of an all-day game bowled by a surprised Roger Hunt of the Hampshire Hogs) is not strictly accurate. Lately I have only had flashbacks three times a day.

More typical is having to show significant grit under intense psychological pressure. I speak as someone who was once on a hat-trick of dropped chances while Mike Gatting stood a yard away at first slip. After the second one went down,

Gatt was not so much stroking his beard ruminatively as pulling it out in chunks. "Another one in the back of the net, keeper," he roared, in no mood to suffer fools indefinitely. I was reminded of his caustic reaction a couple of years ago when a side called the Stragglers of Asia unaccountably invited me to play against the Sussex Martlets at Arundel. It was a fixture which required a certain degree of cricketing aptitude, a fact underlined when the first ball of the match struck me on the breastbone standing ten yards back before I had seen it leave the bowler's hand. Apparently we had enlisted a left-arm paceman fresh from trials with Gloucestershire who was unaware he was amongst geriatrics.

His fifth ball caught the helmet-less batter a nasty blow in the face and produced more blood on a good length than I've seen before or since. In came No.3, who duly edged a blur of leather to my right. The gods of cricket do not normally bother with midweek jazz-hat friendlies but, in this instance, they were merciful. The ball struck the webbing of my outstretched right glove and stayed there, a violent thunderstorm arrived 10 minutes later to remove any chance of further play, and my reputation – somehow – survived.

How much easier to play imaginary games; to pretend that, but for a quirk of fate, I could have been a county contender. Sadly, my representative career culminated with a match for Dorset under-17s against Somerset under-17s at Chard, when I missed so many stumpings the coach refused to shake my hand afterwards and left without further ado. There was not even the comfort of a rejection letter.

The keeper from our part of the world who did make it was Adrian Aymes, against whom I used to play whenever his Hursley Park colts side faced Basingstoke & North Hampshire CC. He had all the pro chat at an early age, coupled with an impressive batting technique. Me? I fancied myself as more of a quiet, unobtrusive old-school gloveman. Correctly – and to no one's surprise – Hampshire opted for Aymes.

Still, never mind. He never played with some of the weird and wonderful cricketers I've encountered across Wessex, Scotland, Sussex, Surrey and, more latterly, Devon. I won't list all my favourite bowlers, but a good few – Jamie Bird, Paul Grellier, Tim Billington, Paul Garlick, Christopher "The Gette" Bazalgette, Richard "Hack" Gwynn, Rob Rydon and Ed How – spring to mind. They would doubtless say they would have taken even more wickets with a decent accomplice behind the sticks. Jamie and Ed are no longer with us but – along with another talented childhood cricketing mate Colin Smith – their smiles will never be forgotten.

The first-class wicket-keepers atop my personal all-time list also include numerous fine – as well as athletic and gifted – men. If you could distill the best bits of Bob Taylor (forever the best technician in my eyes), Rod Marsh, Jeffrey Dujon, Jack Richards (all excellent standing back) and Jack Russell, Derek Taylor, Bobby Parks and Chris Read (brilliant standing up), you would have a keeper to match any modern-day practitioner. Yes, I know specialists are now a dying species but consider the classic wicket-keeper's reaction when standing up to the stumps and dealing with a ball heading down the leg side. The balletic chassis across from right to left (assuming it is a right-handed bat), the guessing of the ball's trajectory as it dips from view behind the batsman, the sweet sensation of ball in glove, the swift transfer to right hand and the deft flick to dislodge the leg bail… we are talking art as much as science. If an appreciation of such skill ends up alongside creams, whitewash, slip cradles and scoreboard tins in cricket's lost lexicon, we will have lost something enormously precious.

How much more uplifting, instead, to imagine a modern renaissance in classic stumping and for major series to be won as much by top-class keeping as batting or bowling. At the very least, young cricketers need to be taught that the bloke in the gloves is not simply a stopper whose job is to shout "Good areas, buddy" after each delivery. Maybe we need squadrons of middle-aged keepers, smelling slightly of liniment and musty inners, to tour the country and spread the pimpled gospel. Say the word and us old-timers will be there, strained calf muscles or not.

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THE GREAT LEVELLER

Mike Jakeman celebrates cricket's pro-am tradition

Like many fellow *Nightwatchman* writers and readers, I play for a mediocre cricket team. Red Square Lions CC is loosely connected to The Economist Intelligence Unit – the sister company of *The Economist* – where many of us currently or used to work. We are a Sunday outfit in the truest sense. Not for us the hassle and expense of maintaining a ground or the fussiness of wearing matching kit. This is strictly social cricket, albeit accompanied by a fierce will to win.

We try to organise the same 10 or 11 friendlies each summer, travelling to play the thirds or fourths of clubs dotted just inside or outside the M25. The names of these otherwise unconnected towns and villages – Little Missenden, Felbridge, Fordcombe, Hyde Heath, Pembury – give a rhythm to our summers. Our season concludes with a weekend tour to the south of France to play a couple of sauvignon-soaked games against a bunch of expats. We lose more than we win and our average age rises by exactly a year, every year. Yet it always feels as if we are only a flash of inspiration or a little more application away from a decent run.

Every so often life intervenes. A stag weekend, a wedding, Ramadan or a good Glastonbury line-up lands in the diary, and a game is cancelled. As any amateur cricket captain knows, the process of finding new fixtures is a more delicate and diplomatic task than you might imagine. Will the teams be evenly matched? Will our lot contrive to find their way there on time? Will the tea be decent?

Earlier this season, the Lions travelled to the unfamiliar postcode of N8 to play our first (and perhaps last) game against the fourths of Highgate CC. We soon picked up the scent of a club that knows what it is doing. Their pavilion had two storeys. Their main pitch was ringed by an impressive set of nets to protect spectators from their lusty hitting. Best of all, the scoreboard was updated electronically from the boundary rope. We sensed that far greater players than us had been soundly beaten on their grass.

Upstairs, in the away dressing-room, I found our captain with an odd look on his face, as if he had been told a particularly good joke but was reluctant to share it. "So they've hedged their bets," he said, with a dramatic pause, "and only picked the one first-class player."

During our travels, we've come across some good cricketers. There is a West Indian batsman at Turnham Green and Polytechnic CC who has an iffy technique but belts the ball to the boundary before I have finished my follow-through. Then there is a father-and-son pair of opening bowlers in Hackney who always get us cheaply. But the best players we come across are usually teenagers on the way up. They play the odd Sunday game on loan from the seconds, before graduating to the firsts and then, with a bit of luck, a county. But these young bucks, with raw talent but little finesse, were the best we had faced. In our ten-year history, we had never played against a professional.

Our captain "arranged" the toss, conscious that if the Lions batted first the game could be over before tea. As we took to the field, the feeling was more of intrigue than intimidation. Somewhere in their line-up was a player of a higher quality than I had ever encountered; a man with the skills to persuade other men to pay him to play. Although I tried to hide it, I was morbidly fascinated with what he would do to my wobbly medium-pacers.

After 15 overs, I was fairly sure I had identified our pro. Highgate's opening pair consisted of their skipper – an elegant player, especially off his legs – and an Australian brute called Donaldson, who had taken a liking to each of our bowlers. Standing at deep mid off, the ball was repeatedly hit over my head and into a nearby tennis court. He paid little attention to who was bowling; the result was the same. I got the nod as first change and ran in ritualistically to receive my punishment. I was soon suckered by one of the oldest tricks in the book. The harder Donaldson hit me, the faster I tried to bowl, and the shorter and more obliging I became. It wasn't quite Broad to Yuvraj, but nor was I helping our chances. The captain suggested I might want a rest. "I didn't come all this way to bowl two overs," I replied, more than a little snappily.

In the next over, our off-spinning all-rounder made the breakthrough and Donaldson was out, for a brutal 77, scored mostly in boundaries. A new batsman at the crease lifted my spirits and the lethargy of my "even slower" ball bowled him for a duck. I sought to keep the pressure on, but greeted the No.4 with a leg-side wide. No matter. The next ball was a decent in-swinger and he failed to move his feet. The umpire had no choice but to give the lbw. That was about as good as it got. Their next batsman was made of sterner stuff and, despite a flurry of late wickets, Highgate cruised to 287 for 8, off a chastening 39 overs.

At tea, I sought out my antipodean assailant to discover which Big Bash team he played for. He grinned and he said he had played grade cricket

in Brisbane – a standard roughly equivalent to an English county second team – but that he wasn't Highgate's overseas signing, adding; "You must be pretty happy. Have you ever got a pro before?" It turned out the club's first-class man was none other than my lbw victim. I was flabbergasted. His name is Hashen Ramanayake, and he plays for the Tamil Union Cricket and Athletic Club in Colombo. My chest swelled and I broke out into a broad smile. I was experiencing what was likely to be the sporting highlight of my entire life, just a few weeks before my 30th birthday. It was an odd sensation. I felt both pride in the moment – even if it was almost entirely the result of an inexplicable misjudgement on the part of my opponent – and a slight sense of redundancy about the future.

We returned to the field in pursuit of 290, well aware that our highest-ever score of 212 meant that the chase was pretty notional. I took my usual position behind the stumps, and Hashen handed me his cap. He usually bowls seam-up, but he declined the opportunity to charge in against us. Instead, he delivered four overs of off spin, which had us in trouble immediately. I gave our captain the benefit of the doubt for a desperately tight lbw call in the first over, but after that we were bamboozled. Allied to some disciplined seam bowling at the other end, the score was 22 for 4 at the end of Hashen's spell. We had been schooled, and he was playing well within himself.

There was time for one more memorable moment. At some point, a firm push broke the circle of fielders, and Hashen hared after it from extra cover. He slid, scooped up the ball and threw it in a single motion. The ball travelled 70 yards on a perfectly flat trajectory and made a pleasingly high-pitched *pfffftt* as it landed in the stationary keeper's gloves. Watching that during a Test match would have been an utterly unremarkable thing. It is the sort of routine excellence we expect from international cricketers. But seeing it happen in front of my eyes was quite special. Soon after, the game was over. We had been thoroughly outclassed, and lost by more than 200 runs.

After we had changed, I was privy to a slightly awkward conversation between the two captains. Ours apologised for our failure to provide a competitive side; theirs insisted they had still enjoyed an afternoon in the sun. There may have been a joke about us playing them into form. There was also a mutual agreement that any future contests would have to involve a Highgate side without any loanees from the Firsts in order to provide a better game and a more enjoyable afternoon for our opponents. There is little real satisfaction for either side in sporting mismatches.

Yet this game also demonstrated something unique about cricket. In what other sport would you find a professional casually mixing it with the Sunday stragglers? After all, when an injured footballer deigns to sit with the crowd for a game he is hailed as some sort of folk hero. Professionalisation, with all of its demands and rewards, has seen the gap between players and fans widen further and further, until each seems like a separate species. Perhaps golf, with its pro-am competitions, is keeping some of this interaction alive, but cricket does the same thing, up and down the country without fanfare every weekend. That day in north London, cricket provided a lousy sporting spectacle but a memory to treasure.

After the drinking was done, I headed home and for the first time ever, found that one of my wickets had his own page on Cricinfo.

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CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORGOTTEN

Hugh Chevallier remembers Phillip Hughes in the sad tale of Ben Stroud

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

Yet there is a fearful symmetry to these two encounters, a symmetry that gives irrefutable proof of the enduring danger of cricket. Both matches were abruptly abandoned when a player was fatally injured doing something he loved. There were differences. After Phillip Hughes was struck – in a fixture being live-streamed on the internet – bulletins flew around the globe, the cricket community could talk of nothing else, and a nation was consumed by sorrow. In Ben Stroud's case the blow was witnessed by a handful and, though there was widespread grief in a small community that keenly felt the loss of a dear son, his death has left barely a trace.

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The field at the back of my north Hampshire garden has grown many crops over the years. Just now it's potatoes. In the spring, a squadron of tractors builds up wave upon wave of ridge and furrow, ridge and furrow. The evening sun transforms the ridges into miniature mountain ranges that stretch to the far distant hedge. As the days lengthen, young plants burst from the ridgetop and the earth turns green. By midsummer, the sea of leaves is white-flecked with potato flowers. The scene has a beauty, and a sadness. For more than a century, the whites would have been worn by cricketers; the flowers would have been daisies in the short-cropped turf. And the farmworkers here would have been discussing tactics with the skipper or chatting by the rickety pavilion, not contractors brought in to blitz a field with as much heavy machinery as nearby RAF Odiham.

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In 1964, the year Geoffrey Boycott made his Test debut on a bigger stage, cricket left Upton Grey. It's not clear when it arrived, though the village were playing Basingstoke in 1842 – and defeating them a year later. Odiham, three miles away, trace their cricket history to 1764, so perhaps Upton Grey began in the 18th century too. Like every rural club, they drew from those who worked on or with the land. The captain might have lived in the big house, but few of his team did. Their days were spent in farm or forge, yard or stable, garden or mill. Village cricket allowed landowner and landworker to play together – and compete – on a proverbially level playing field. Except the downland of North Hampshire is rarely flat, and the slope at Upton Grey beat Lord's into a cocked hat.

After the war, the influx of newcomers picked up speed. (I would be one many years later.) The new villagers worked in Basingstoke or Reading or London, and breathed prosperity into the community. Houses (and their prices) were done up. All looked well. But the hike in property values – and rents – was not reflected in rural wages, and many who worked in the village found it harder to live here. Meanwhile many who did live in the village but worked elsewhere found a busy week punctuated by a lengthy commute made it harder to devote time to a game of cricket, let alone the preparation of a pitch. Though farming was not yet today's agro-industrial monster, employment in the countryside was growing thinner, and the club struggled to raise a team from Upton Grey and the two nearest hamlets, Weston Patrick and Tunworth. More and more, numbers were made up by friends, or friends of friends, from Fleet or Basingstoke. The heavy lifting, though, fell on an ageing and diminishing band.

By the early 1960s, the ground was leased to the club at the nominal rent of a shilling a year by Jim Turner, from Manor Farm. Peter Bedford, the last secretary of the UGCC, describes Turner as "a straightforward man focused on his farming – in which cricket had no role to play". To others, he was known as "Prairie Jim" or "Texas Turner" for his strong dislike of hedges.

The team's fixtures were starting to dwindle, recalls Peter Carter, another member of the side in its last years, and who first turned out for the club in 1947, aged 13, and later had a trial for Hampshire. The start of the 1964 season was particularly slow: week after week went by without any cricket, though several matches – including the fixture against the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston – were planned.

What happened next is unclear. One version has Turner, apparently without warning or discussion with the club, deciding that good land was going to waste and taking a plough to the pitch. Another claims that the farmer, seeing the team drifting towards

oblivion, gave a year's notice of his intentions. Whatever the truth, as the share bit into the turf, so a club quietly vanished, the ground destined to grow wheat, barley, oats – and now potatoes. Bedford and Carter agree there wasn't the outrage one might have expected. There were other reasons the club was floundering: a curmudgeonly landlord in The Hoddington Arms, where the team repaired for tea and more, had made them feel unwelcome, the pavilion-cum-shed was falling down, and the sense of camaraderie wasn't what it was. Yet if you find someone who grew up in the village, there can still be a trace of anger.

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Nearly 25 years ago, my wife and I moved into a tiny cottage in Tunworth, a mile or so from Upton Grey. I was keen to play some village cricket, and asked around for a local team willing to put up with my shortcomings. There had been a club, I was told, but it had folded some while back. Before the subject took a different course, my neighbour recalled that someone involved with the Upton Grey team had died during a game, but it was a long time ago, memories were hazy and details hazier still. Anyway, I made do with an occasional team put out by colleagues at AA Publishing. Or they made do with me. We played an execrable standard, but we had fun.

Twelve years on, and with two growing children, our Tunworth cottage was bursting at the seams. We eventually fetched up in Upton Grey, in a house named Spinners. I assumed a connection with the wool trade, but in fact a previous occupant called Malcolm Hooker – apparently a slow bowler of some talent – had been keen to leave his stamp on the village. The apostrophe, if ever one existed, had been mislaid before we arrived. The guilty party was unlikely to have been Hooker's successor at Spinners. Like me, Jeremy Westwood was a cricket-lover and a publisher. Unlike me, one imagines, his daughter would marry Robin Martin-Jenkins, the Sussex all-rounder and son of the inestimable Christopher. Given that I was now on the staff at John Wisden & Co, the various cricket connections suggested this was the right move.

Over the next dozen years, a couple of people, after hearing I worked for *Wisden*, told me the field at the back of my house had once been the village cricket ground. No one knew anything of the chap who had died – or maybe they did and I never asked the right question. The club and the pitch had faded like a rainbow after a shower. Once or twice, as I gazed from the garden gate on a warm evening, the sounds peculiar to a game of village cricket would come to me. The thwack of a mistimed drive; the call for another amble up the wicket; the "Ooh!" from fielders as another catchable slip chance goes begging; the rattle of leather on ash as a wicket falls; the slap on the back for a successful bowler; the gentle commiseration for an out-of-form lower-order slogger on yet another duck. The soundtrack, of course, was to my own cricketing life. Of summer after summer of Upton Grey cricket there was not the faintest echo.

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This spring, I was asked to write a piece – this piece, it transpires – for *The Nightwatchman*. I'd long meant to find out more about the story I heard almost a quarter of a century earlier, yet done nothing. The commission was the spur, though initial enquiries proved dispiriting: a friend who is also the village historian had no record of a cricket pitch, let alone anything so remarkable as a death. Jeremy Westwood was similarly in the dark; he knew nothing of the men and boys who had played for the village, not even that there had been a pitch beyond his back garden. A family who for 40 years or more had lived in the big house up the hill could confirm the site of the pitch, but that was as far as it went. And a Google search proved fruitless.

Or so it seemed. Then my wife tried a different combination of terms, and sent me a link to a short article in the *Western Daily Press*, dated 23 August 1933. I shelled out the £6.95 that allowed me to read beyond the first few words, and the story emerged:

CRICKETER KILLED

Struck on Back of the Neck by the Ball

While playing cricket at Upton Grey, near Basingstoke, Hampshire, Benjamin George Stroud (28), of Weston Patrick, near Basingstoke, was struck by the ball on the back of the neck, and died on the way to the hospital.

At the inquest, yesterday, Charles Toomer stated that he was batting with Stroud when the bowler delivered a well-pitched ball and Toomer hit it. The ball hit Stroud as he turned his head to avoid it.

Dr E. A. Widdowson stated the death was due to a ruptured artery at the base of the brain, and a verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

The parallel with Phillip Hughes was shocking. As Andrew Ramsey, writing in *Wisden 2015*, said: "He had received a blow to the left side of his neck, just below his helmet. The impact crushed his vertebral artery, causing it to split and resulting in a massive brain haemorrhage… Fewer than 100 cases had been recorded in medical literature, only one inflicted by a cricket ball. In most instances death had been immediate." Could Ben Stroud have been that one previous instance?

The footage of Hughes putting his hands on his knees and then falling, face first, to the ground was appalling, yet this brief, detached report of a long-ago death affected me as much. It happened in my village – might even have been visible from my back window. How could I not have known about it? Armed with a name and a date, I needed only a few minutes' research in Basingstoke Library to unearth a detailed account, published six days later, in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*.

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The game between Upton Grey and Crookham starts at three o'clock on Saturday, 19 August. The pitch is no friend of batsmen, and earlier in the season a visiting team from Water End dismissed them for 18. So Upton Grey's 57 for 5, reached in 45 minutes, has the look of a decent total. Charlie Toomer, the No.3, is on 22; Ben Stroud, the team's keeper, is on three. It is

Toomer's second summer in the team, and his all-round talents make him an instant success. After his first season he sweeps the board at the end-of-year awards, winning the cups for best batting and bowling averages, as well as the five-shilling purse for most catches. It's no surprise he's now vice-captain.

The scorebook – or at least the relevant page – survives, but for the crucial delivery the bowler's name does not, unless it's Hall, with three wickets under his belt, or Chillery, who has cleaned up the other two. Whoever it is, he loses his length, and the batsman's eyes light up. "The ball came straight to me," Toomer later remembers, "and was rather well pitched. I hit it rather harder than any ball I had hit during the match."

Charlie Toomer lives outside the main village. His employer is Percy Bullivant, a Yorkshireman who bought the stately Tunworth Old Rectory from the church in 1917. Bullivant prefers horses to cars, and Toomer works as a groom. His modest home is a cottage next to the allotments and opposite the tiny school. Neighbours play for Upton Grey too: Jack Lucas, who runs the Tunworth post office, has just been bowled for five.

Ben Stroud, quite tall for a wicket-keeper, comes from a long-established Weston Patrick family, and as if to prove it he lives with his parents, Edward and Emily, in a house called Strouds Cottage. He works as a labourer for WJ Hunt, and is fit because Hunt's yard is in Herriard, at the top of a long and unrelenting hill. Sport occupies much of his free time, and when he's not playing cricket, chances are he'll be on the village tennis court. Or arranging whist drives to help fund the two clubs. Or helping out with the scouts. At 28, Ben Stroud is a couple of years younger than Toomer; he is a busy, happy, cheerful, optimistic young man, full of energy and buoyed by the love of his family, neighbours and teammates. And of his fiancée, Peggy McCallum.

"It went straight back without touching the ground, and would have hit Stroud full in the face," recalls Toomer at the inquest. "But he turned to avoid it, and the ball struck him on the back of the neck. He fell to the ground." The effect of the impact is catastrophic and instant. The story is later told that Stroud grunts a terse "Bugger!" and collapses. Fielders and teammates rush to him, now unconscious, and bundle him into a car. It speeds along the narrow road that twists through the downs to Odiham. In the car is Walter Kinge, the Upton Grey captain. He believes Stroud dies on the journey, and at 4.15 Dr Widdowson, after dashing to the small hospital, confirms Kinge's fears.

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The inquest at Odiham's Parish Room on the afternoon of Tuesday, 22 August comprised Dr Widdowson, from the hospital, and HM Foster, coroner for the Aldershot district; there was no need for a jury. Emily Stroud identified her son's body. Widdowson said a post-mortem showed the deceased had been in good health and that he sustained an external injury on the left side of the neck, though not a fracture

of the skull. A ruptured vertebral artery at the base of the brain had caused an extensive haemorrhage. Charlie Toomer, Walter Kinge (employed as a chauffeur in Weston Patrick) and Ernest Tipper, the secretary, all gave accounts of what had happened. Answering questions from the coroner, Toomer said there had been no rough play and that the game was being carried on according to the rules. The verdict, as the papers reported, was accidental death.

The next day, the little church of St Lawrence in Weston Patrick could not contain the mourners. Despite it being a working day, all Ben Stroud's teammates had come, plus several from the Crookham side. He was buried beside his older sister Rose, who had died, aged 29, six years earlier; his matching gravestone would later read "IN LOVED MEMORY OF BENJAMIN GEORGE STROUD – ACCIDENTALLY KILLED AT CRICKET". The *Hants and Berks Gazette* gives details of the flowers and their tributes. They number 69.

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Life in the village somehow went on. It had to. Before the club AGM the following February, held in the Scout Hut where Stroud helped out, the chairman, the Reverend Henry Sewell, said a brief prayer, and the meeting stood in silence for a few moments. The minutes start with the incongruous words "1933 was another successful season", before recounting one or two highlights of Stroud's career – he shared a partnership of around 70 with Kinge against Burkham in 1929. The meeting also decided "that there should be no match on the third Saturday in August… it was resolved to keep that day as a memorial to their late comrade, Mr B Stroud".

In terms of results, 1933 had been a reasonable summer: of the 24 completed matches, 13 were won and 11 lost. Toomer dominated the bowling, and his figures, even on helpful pitches, proved his skill: 115 wickets at 4.33 apiece. The *Hants and Berks* had reported him as being "very deeply affected" by the tragedy, but he was not a man to show it, at least not publicly, and he accepted the captaincy for 1934. He promptly trimmed his bowling average, claiming 88 at 3.71, and led the batting. The results matched his achievements: 18 wins, four defeats and a draw.

In 1939, the club shut down for the duration of the war, and the ground fell quiet. When cricket returned, Toomer did not. He was in his early 40s, and had left Tunworth. He came back for a few matches in the 1950s, but his children were growing up, and his connection with the village had weakened.

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During my research, I discovered that Toomer's son, Phil, lives in Basingstoke. He knew of the awful events of 1933, though it was his mother, and never his father, who spoke of them. Phil played cricket too, and he remembers his dad giving him clear advice: "Always watch the ball; always watch the ball."

Ben Stroud had no children, but his sister Rose had two daughters, Emily and Eileen, who grew up with their

grandparents. Eileen married Frank Young, a stalwart of Upton Grey CC, and their son Mick (Ben's great-nephew) now works at Manor Farm, which includes the old cricket pitch. The field is called Home Bidden, betraying no hint of its past. Back in the 1990s Mick and I played a couple of games for a Hoddington Arms side. But I never thought to ask him about the half-forgotten tale of a player being killed during a game of cricket...

Phil and Mick have known each other for years, often going beating together. But neither had any inkling about their connection until this June. And it dawned on me that I also have a faint link to the tragedy. Jack Lucas, who had batted at No.4 on that day in August 1933, was Tunworth's postmaster – and the cottage where I lived in Tunworth was The Old Post Office.

The sudden death of any young person is horrifying. It is impossible to imagine the grief of Edward and Emily, burying a second child in St Lawrence's churchyard. Spare a thought too for Charlie Toomer, who never talked about what happened that day, when he middled a ball from a Crookham bowler. As far as I am aware, and I have consulted cricket historians with a deep knowledge of the game, this is the sole instance of a batsman being killed by a teammate, the only time the non-striker has died after being hit by the ball.

That isn't precisely how Phillip Hughes died – he was struck by a bouncer from Sean Abbott, a New South Wales opponent – but the injury that caused the deaths was identical. There is one other poignant parallel between the two tragedies. Sitting in the stands at the SCG were Hughes's mother, Virginia, and his sister Megan, who saw the events unfold. The scorer for Upton Grey that August afternoon, and who also watched the events unfold, was Stroud's fiancée, Peggy McCallum.

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MATCH BETWEEN Upton Grey AND Crookham
Upton Grey 1st INNINGS. DATE 19th August 1933

	BATSMAN.	SCORE.	HOW OUT.	BOWLER.	TOTAL
1	H. Rowell	1·	L.B.W.	Hall	1
2	W. Robats	1·2·4·	Bowled	Hall	7
3	C. Toomer	2·3·1·1·1·1·1·1·1·1·4·1·2·1·			
4	J. Lucas	1·4·	Bowled	P. Chillery	5
5	F. White	2·	Bowled	P. Chillery	2
6	W. Kinge	4·4·1·1·2·4·	Ct. P. Chillery	Hall	16
7	B. Stroud	2·1·			
8	D. Childs				
9	J. Smith				
10	H. Williams				
11	E. Thurlby				

Fall of Wickets: 1 for 2, 2 for 17, 3 for 22, 4 for 26, 5 for 49

The score book at the moment the accident occured.

EDWARD + EMILY STROUD SON BEN DAUGHTER EVA + A FAMILY FRIEND

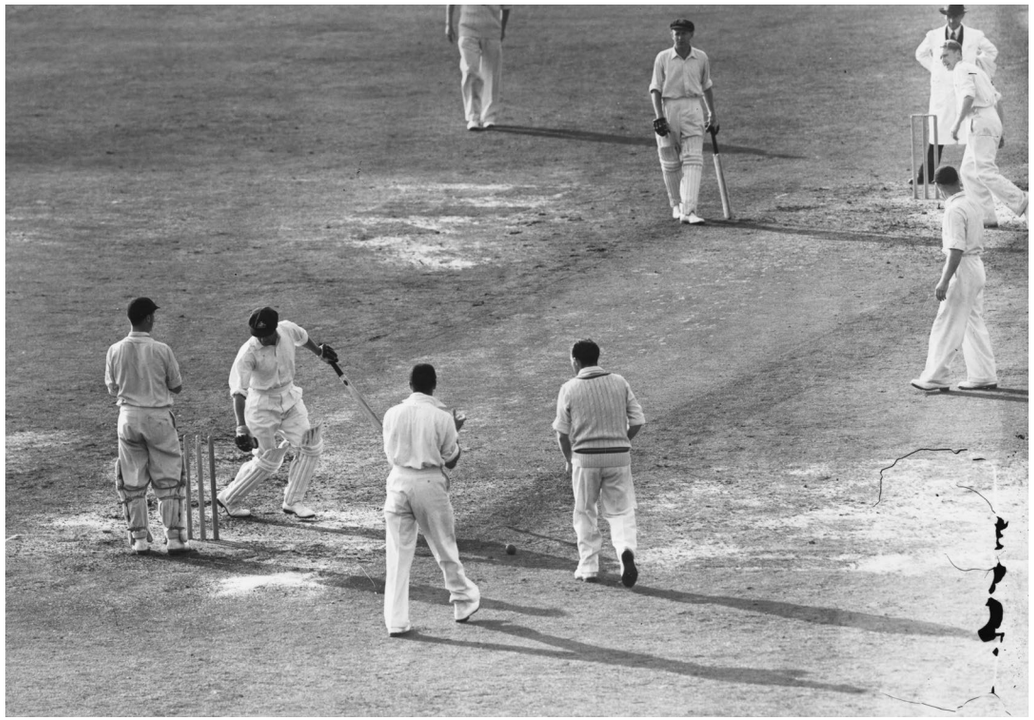
EDWARD STROUD GRAND DAUGHTERS EMILY + EILEEN, EMILY AND FRIEND

ASHES TO ASHES

Another Ashes summer has come and gone - hold the feeling for just a little longer with some of the most memorable and quirky moments since the contest began

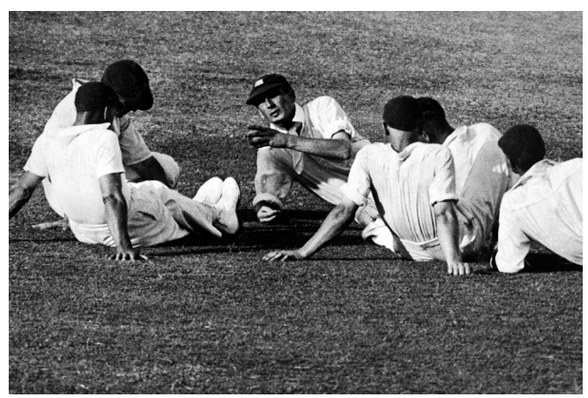
LAND DOWN UNDER
During the long journey to Australia, England cricketers Tom Mitchell (left), Harold Larwood and Eddie Paynter (right) listen to a gramophone on board the RMS Orontes, shortly before the Bodyline series of 1932–33.
Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images

PARTING THE SEA
Denis Compton and Bill Edrich make their way through the crowd after England pull off a famous win – in the fifth Test at The Oval – to take the 1953 series 1-0 and regain the Ashes after 21 years.
Photo: Central Press/Getty Images



THE LAST WALTZ
Don Bradman is bowled for a duck off a googly from Eric Hollies in his final Test innings at The Oval during the 1948 series. *Photo: Central Press/Getty Images*

WELCOME HOME
The Australian Test cricketers are greeted enthusiastically upon arrival at Waterloo Station for the 1938 Ashes. Don Bradman chats here with Middlesex cricketer Gubby Allen. *Photo: Popperfoto*

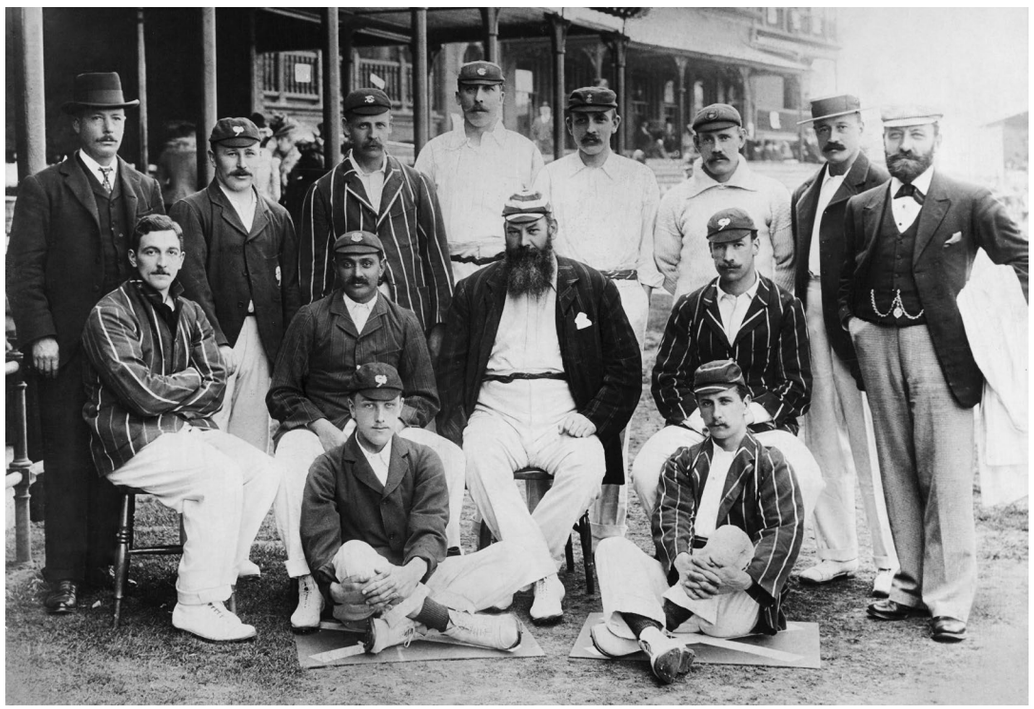


HEADING FOR SAFETY
The police protect Australia captain Bill Woodfull as he leaves the pitch after the fifth Test at The Oval in 1930. The Australians won by an innings and 39 runs to regain the Ashes with a 2-1 series win. *Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images*

STRATEGIC PLANNING
England captain Douglas Jardine makes a point to his players after the fall of an Australian wicket during the first Bodyline Test, at the SCG, in 1932. England won the game by 10 wickets and the series 4-1. *Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images*

UNDER THE TASMAN SUN
The MCC team enjoy a boat trip on their day off in Launceston, Tasmania, during the 1925 tour.
Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images

GRACING THE OCCASION
England captain WG Grace before his final appearance for England, at Trent Bridge, during the first Test of the 1899 Ashes – the match ended in a draw. Seated to his right is Ranjitsinhji.
Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images



VITAL SIGNS
Members of the England team have their temperature taken by the nurses at Woodman's Point in Fremantle during the period of quarantine forced upon them after an outbreak of typhoid on board RMS Osterley. England were travelling to Australia for the 1920 series.
Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images

DECKED OUT
Members of the MCC team aboard the Ophir, which took them to Australia for the 1907–08 series. In his autobiography, Jack Hobbs (second from right) remembers: "There were plenty of amusements on board, the best being deck quoits."
Photo: Popperfoto/Getty Images

MOUTHING OFF

Andrew Ramsey believes the Aussies' words are coming back to bite them

On what should have been the fourth and most celebratory afternoon of the three-day third Ashes Test of 2015, a trio of mates – gathered in Birmingham to enjoy a weekend of cricket and tippling – took a boat cruise on the Worcester canal to fill their unplanned free time.

As befitting England fans who had been denied the chance to watch their team complete one of their most meritorious recent wins because the opposition wasn't sufficiently competitive to push the match into the weekend, they were lamenting. Not just the inadequacies of the touring team's batting, the inaccuracies of their bowling and the injustice of finding themselves sipping bottled Morland ale, while idling along a disused coal-and-chocolate-crumb trade route rather than swilling pints of lager in the Hollies Stand while lending their voices to Mitchell Johnson ditties.

"Would have been better if we had New Zealand for five Tests," noted one of the group who had travelled from Belfast for a weekend at the Test. "Not only would they have put up more of a fight, they'd have done it with a smile on their faces."

This prompted a large, deeply tanned passenger to haul himself from his seat and, in an awkward crouch given the limited headroom for anyone above 5'8", take issue in an accent as broad and flat as Australia itself. "I've just about heard enough of this," he hit back, trying his best to cloak his hurt beneath a forced smile. "Just remember who's got the Ashes."

For precisely one more week, as it turned out.

Another catastrophic Test defeat at Trent Bridge, this time in a jot over two days, left all Australians – this correspondent included – feeling as uncertain and uncomfortable as a landlubber on a canal boat. And while nobody who claims to know much about cricket saw the Australians free-fall into defeat on the horizon, there had – in retrospect – been an inevitability about this Ashes campaign falling short of the lofty expectations the visitors carried with them when we departed for London in mid-June.

The reason why Australia's cricketers had arrived in the UK bearing the unfamiliar guise of an anti-climactic footnote to what had been a pulsatingly memorable early-summer schedule was because of the act they were forced to follow.

Brendon McCullum's Blackcaps were many things the ticket-buying public knew Michael Clarke's mob were unlikely to be. Except for talented.

The New Zealanders had shown in the preceding World Cup that they could combine flair with fairness, heroics with humility, competitiveness without combativeness. They did play with a smile on their face, partly because they were genuinely enjoying what they were doing, partly because they were doing it as well as anybody in the world, but also because they had made a conscious decision to play their cricket in good humour and an engaging spirit.

It is a spirit embodied by McCullum – once as hard-nosed and quick-mouthed as any feisty 'keeper on the international roster – credited now with extolling the virtues of virtuousness to his team who have proved that nice guys can finish first. Or a creditable second, as was the case in the World Cup final.

But the genesis of this refreshingly honourable approach to a cut-throat professional sport stretches back to the days before McCullum was skipper, prior to the time he had given up the wicket-keeping gloves to become the game's foremost short-form batsman, and the Blackcaps were led by Daniel Vettori.

It all began with the now-infamous run-out of New Zealand's World Cup hero-to-be, Grant Elliott, at The Oval in 2008. The batsman had collided with rival bowler Ryan Sidebottom and been correctly adjudged out when he could not make his ground – this riled Vettori who believed the ethical course of action would have been for England captain Paul Collingwood to withdraw his team's appeal.

He did not, and Elliott was sent packing. But Vettori had decided in the wake of that game that if the manner in which cricket was played was to truly change, then it had to be the responsibility of the participants to drive it. And, in a confluence of events at which even Dan Brown might baulk, that opportunity dawned the very first time New Zealand and England crossed paths after that fractious 2008 series.

With the Blackcaps facing a must-win scenario to remain in the hunt for the 2009 ICC Champions Trophy in South Africa, they reduced England to 3 for 27 when Collingwood almost wore a snorter that flew off a length on a lively Wanderers track. Perhaps relieved, maybe in mild shock, Collingwood took several steps down the pitch to try and ascertain from where that spring-loaded delivery had sprung, and McCullum – realising "over" had not been formally called – under-armed the ball into the

stumps. An appeal went up, and the provocateur from The Oval was hoist by his own petard.

However, despite the gravity of the game and the mouth-watering chance to claim justice, Vettori put principle ahead of pragmatism and – as the on-field officials and players gathered to receive the third umpire's definitive ruling – the New Zealand skipper explained to his team that their foe should be recalled. Defying cinema stereotypes, the men in black had become the good guys.

When McCullum inherited the one-day leadership from Vettori in the Blackcaps' next match and the Test captaincy from Ross Taylor four years later, he felt committed to maintaining the philosophy Vettori had nurtured.

And on one of the first occasions that the trans-Tasman neighbours faced off after McCullum assumed the dual leadership, the impact it had on New Zealand's bigger, brasher, more bombastic opponent was as instructive as it was effective. In the aftermath of Australia's defeat at Auckland in the co-hosts' first meeting of the 2015 World Cup, hard-nosed wicket-keeper Brad Haddin remarked that he had found the New Zealand reluctance to engage in anything other than a battle of cricket skills so disturbing it should never be repeated. "They were that nice to us in New Zealand, and we were that uncomfortable," Haddin said in a radio interview the morning after the World Cup final – this when the disposition of the winning team was as much a topic of discussion as their success, even among their own fans. "I said in the [pre-final] team meeting: 'I can't stand for this anymore. We're going at them as hard as we can.'"

Even allowing for the inebriation factor and the ill-advised rationale of going to air in such a state, the notion that playing sport in a civil, considered manner can be construed as offensive and therefore worthy of retribution was so illogical it bordered on genius. Or so it seemed when Australia romped to victory in the encounter that most mattered at the MCG in late March. But the sight of Haddin offering unsolicited advice to several Blackcaps batsmen after they were dismissed in the final sat uneasily with an otherwise approving Australian audience.

As with Haddin's radio ramblings the following morning, the newly minted world champs had revealed themselves to be dinosaurs out of step with a world that now expects more from its public figures. And, even more pointedly, has access to myriad global platforms from which to demand it.

So it was into this world – still fragrant from the refreshing zephyr brought by McCullum and his well-behaved, and truly exciting, cricketers who had lifted England's players and fans on their perfumed updraft – that the old-school Australians trudged in. Those among them who bothered to read the newspapers could not have been unaware of the goodwill that the New Zealanders carried with them through a drawn Test series, and into what was celebrated as the most exhilarating, uplifting limited-overs tournament the game's homeland had hosted.

Those who followed social media would have sensed the undercurrent of disappointment among a not-insubstantial core of cricket followers who felt the Blackcaps had unfairly served as the fresh, catchy warm-up act to a troupe of tired rockers set to snarl out their backdated catalogue. And even the ones who managed to block out those channels could not have avoided the plea from James Anderson – known as a provocateur to many an Australia player and follower – for the coming Ashes campaign to be played in more of a "positive" Kiwi-esque spirit.

Once again, it was all too much for Haddin. "I don't understand where they're coming from with this," Haddin told a gathering of reporters when the touring team held an open media day amid the sprawling surrounds of a country club-cum-day spa in the Essex countryside.

"I don't understand this pleasant… I don't know what it is." His inability to frame sentences only highlighted how this outbreak of civility that was insidiously finding its way into the game on his watch was unsettling his team.

But still the Australians laughed it off as an affectation. At their Chelmsford training session the following day, the white board used by coaches to communicate the practice schedule had been wiped clear and replaced with a pointedly unsubtle message: "Remember – Sledge Free Tour".

In the afterglow of his team's unexpected first Test win at Cardiff, Anderson sucked deeply on the peace pipe while noting that the Australians had declined the invitation to visit England's dressing-room at the game's end to share a drink and a chat. The underlying message was that the Aussie truism of "we play hard on the field, but all that's forgotten over a beer at the end of the day" was only applicable when the baggy green cap brigade were downing those drinks in triumph.

"That's their [the Australians] prerogative," Anderson said, adopting the role of conciliator after having been cast for so long as an agitator. The Australians felt the need to explain away their snub by claiming those drinks were only ever cracked at the end of a series, not the cessation of each match.

But the awkwardness belied a deeper truth. The current crop of Australian cricketers – following a deeply ingrained philosophical tradition that has a foundation laid generations ago – genuinely feel they cannot achieve their optimum playing potential unless they are often tactically, physically and verbally bellicose.

Listen to their public comments when queried about the spirit and manner in which they compete and you will quickly pick up a recurrent theme.

We play an aggressive brand of cricket.

We play an attacking brand of cricket.

We play an Australian brand of cricket.

Unfortunately, as the Blackcaps have showed in their guise as entertainment missionaries and as England happily mimicked, in today's global market consumers are spoiled

for choice. And brand Australia would appear to be peddling a product rapidly approaching its use-by date.

But, as Haddin exemplified, it's not so straightforward for Australia's cricketers to simply draft in a team of pony-tailed marketing consultants, design a new logo, nail it above a smiley, inclusive mission statement and re-launch the lippy lads as every mother's favourite sons-in-law. The genesis for this antagonistic style of playing lies beyond the wisdom passed down by square-jawed, sweat-soaked carriers of Australia's cricket flame. It lies even deeper than the nation's admired grassroots cricket system and backyard games where baiting and ridiculing an opponent is a time-honoured way of stealing an edge to even out any imbalance in talent. It lies, as we see uncomfortably often in our daily Australian life, at the soul of our character – an often pathological need to prove one's worth. One that far more learned social anthropologists might well subscribe to the country's foundation as a brutal penal colony on the far side of the world, but which lay folk could interpret as a basic evolutionary need to be noticed.

In world affairs, geo-political influence, economic muscle and even the longer-term history of human endeavour, we are but a peripheral figure. Given that spheres of influence such as politics, population and power are ones that will forever elude an isolated island nation that is European by colonial heritage, American via cultural imperialism and Asian due to geography, sport and celebrity remain the megaphones by which Australians announce themselves to the wider world. Thus Australian sports teams and their often equally in-your-face supporters believe their key strategic weapon is to be louder and prouder.

Which might also explain why, after the Ashes were lost with such a spectacularly meek capitulation to Stuart Broad and Co at Trent Bridge, the Australian press went on a shrill rampage of blame that sprayed any number of culprits ranging from the now-retired skipper Clarke to the players' wives and girlfriends. A team decried months earlier for the ungracious manner in which they won was now being pilloried because they had betrayed its people by losing.

But why does New Zealand, an even smaller, more isolated, less extolled nation not produce similar progeny with even shriller voices? The anecdotal answer would seem to be precisely for the criteria outlined above. They understand and happily accept they are marginal, less visible, more remote from the action and are therefore content in not wasting energy and volume trying to be something they are not.

That's not to downplay the significance of the Blackcaps' achievement in reaching the final of cricket's one-day showpiece, despite being the least-populace nation in the 14-team competition. But from the Australian perspective, they seem far more comfortable in their skins knowing they will rarely have the opportunity to make a grand entrance on the world's main stage, but utterly confident in their ability to put together a totally unique, top-notch fringe event.

So it is that the New Zealanders have taken that lateral thinking to cricket and shown the world that it can be played in serious company – and played very well – by folks who are prepared to stand by the "spirit of the game" creed they've adopted even when that very game is challenging them. Defying them. Making them grumpy.

And the world – encapsulated by the man on the canal boat deprived of a couple of days of cricket – is loving them back.

England's canal system was a triumph of planning and delivery – a low-maintenance, cost-effective means by which to shift resources and goods throughout a country at a time when it grew to dominate the known world. But gradually the ponderous vessels lost trade to the railways, which were in turn overtaken by the motorways that are increasingly surrendering traction to the information superhighway, as people inevitably find that the methods they saw as essential might actually be obsolete, and that bold new ideas make for a better fit with a changed era.

By the time Australia reached the mid-point of their ultimately doomed 2015 Ashes tour, a number of the pugnacious old guard – including Haddin – had lost their places in the Test team, replaced by younger, sleeker alternatives. Perhaps the time for a rebranding of our style of cricket is similarly nigh.

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STANDING IN QUICKSAND

Kamran Abbasi feels the pressures of being a Pakistani captain

Without leaders, where would Pakistan cricket be? How important is leadership to the self-esteem and profile of a new country finding its place in the world? AH Kardar. Imran Khan. Misbah-ul-Haq. The spine. The rocks of Pakistan cricket, standing firm in the storm waters that crashed against them. How do you begin to place a value on Misbah's influence in the dressing-room, or his Zen-like cool at the crease when the tension rises, just as it did during Pakistan's record fourth-innings run-chase in Pallekele in July? Without him, how resolutely would his team stand?

In the chaos of Pakistan, cricket captains hold a special place in the national psyche.

Win the nation's heart, and you will be hailed a hero or a king. Fail, and you will be quickly branded a villain or a bastard. It is a high-stakes game that few men have possessed the nerve and the capabilities to master.

Society and cricket are intertwined and inseparable in a way no other sport can rival. Socio-economic reform in the West Indies, the rise of the working-class in England, and the fight for racial equality in South Africa – these are all landmarks in cricket's entanglement in wider social upheaval. But it is in Pakistan where we now find the most potent example of the value of sport in a dysfunctional society

The benefits of leadership in sport are sometimes disputed. Does it matter who wears the captain's armband in football? To some degree, yes: a captain in every sport can lead by example, like Steven Gerrard or Roy Keane. Football teams, though, are cast in the image of their coach, and only rarely does a player of genius – a Messi or a Ronaldo – subvert the rules of positional play or override the mortality of teammates.

Exceptional individual skill may exert a similar influence in cricket, but leadership has a far greater influence than in other sports. A captain controls the strategy in the field, inspires his men, sets the mood in the dressing-room. Captaincy is often the difference between success and failure. A cricket captain is the public face of triumph and disaster. Leadership in international cricket, especially in a Test match, is a daunting responsibility, the expectations of a nation on your shoulders, each viewer judging every bowling change, fielding position and facial expression.

For some countries, like Pakistan, the captain is a surrogate for the president of the nation, the de facto leader of his people. There is one important difference in Pakistan, however: national cricket captains are accountable, unlike their political counterparts. Being held responsible for results is an unusual concept in a country that allows political leaders to place themselves above the law in a culture of patronage and corruption.

This leadership vacuum that Pakistan captains occupy is formed of four circumstances. First, the country's political system is damaged, denying a legitimate voice to its people, with a consequent loss of faith in political leaders. Second, social disharmony heightens inequalities and a sense of injustice among citizens, who seek refuge and unity in sport. Third, Pakistan, a relatively new nation, seeks to increase its international influence. Fourth, and importantly, cricket is the pre-eminent sport with mass obsessional following.

Meet these criteria and leadership in cricket becomes a matter of national importance. Indeed, other Test nations flirt with these factors, but their focus on the national cricket captain is deflected. South Africa has other major sports. Cricket in Zimbabwe is some way short of a national obsession. India enjoys a stable political system, with great authority and national respect for the office of prime minister.

Others have met the criteria for a period: Sri Lanka, for example, especially in the civil-war days of Arjuna Ranatunga's leadership. The rise of cricket and the social struggles in the West Indies were a defining period in the history of the Caribbean, when cricket leadership was instrumental in forging a new identity. As Bangladesh finds its feet as a cricket nation, the ingredients are in place for cricket leadership to establish an influential place in the people's psyche, similar to how it does in Pakistan.

No country, though, has maintained a leadership vacuum for as long as Pakistan. The criteria for the importance of cricket leadership are institutionalised there. The cricket captain may be better known internationally than the president. He carries with him the hopes and the love of the nation in a way that the president cannot equal unless he engages in conflict with India, America or Israel. Pakistan's international influence is limited in most spheres. Even in sport, Pakistan no longer challenges the best in squash or hockey. Cricket in Pakistan, a rapidly growing nation of 200 million, meets a societal need as in no other country.

Understandably, the burden of Pakistan's captaincy has proved too great for many cricketers, despite no shortage of willing volunteers.

Pakistan's players aspire to the captaincy, partly influenced by the status of the position, but ignorant of the pressure and demands such status brings. Indeed, only a few players have declined the invitation. Saeed Anwar, one of Pakistan's more reflective cricketers, decided he was unsuited to the role and its pressures. Younis Khan wanted the job only on his terms, and walked away when they were unmet. Javed Miandad, as intoxicated with power as he may be, understood that Imran was a greater leader, and agreed to stand aside whenever Imran returned from an absence.

Deciding the best of these captains in this important national role is controversial. In statistical terms, Javed boasts a superior captaincy record to Imran. Rashid Latif, Waqar Younis and Salim Malik, to many people's surprise, might rank the best on win ratio. Mushtaq Mohammad, Wasim Akram and Inzamam-ul-Haq have their supporters. But statistical comparisons in cricket are dangerous, especially between eras. A reliance on statistics only informs each debate but cannot decide it, unless the gulf is so vast as, say, between Donald Bradman and the rest. Even then you might reasonably argue that, had Bradman played in the era of West Indian pace domination, those statistics would have been impossible.

If you base your arguments on statistics, or on events you have never seen, your analysis will reek to those who did witness them. Judgment and contemporary analysis by eyewitnesses hold an immense value in cricket, especially when assessing the performance of captains. We seek out similar analyses of eyewitness accounts, for example, when judging the merits of rulers and monarchs. For a game steeped in numbers, statistics in cricket are merely indicative; they may even be unreliable and misleading. Therein lies the fascination of cricket, a sport that is made for debate.

Statistics aren't required to confirm that Pakistan's history tells of poisonous, destructive civil leadership. Its cricket captains mostly typify the failures of their political counterparts, but the three great leaders of Pakistan cricket – Kardar, Imran, and Misbah – transcended the burdens of their age.

Leadership came naturally to Kardar, an autocratic figure and Pakistan's first captain. Once his playing days ended, he took up leadership positions in politics and cricket, frequent bedfellows in Pakistan. After their unbeaten 1974 tour to England – a forewarning of successes to come – Kardar was bent on challenging the ruling powers of international cricket. By then Kardar, an Oxford Blue and former Warwickshire player familiar with English cricket, was president of the Pakistan Cricket Board of Control. He continued to lead by proposing a new constitution for the International Cricket Conference in order to abolish the undemocratic veto rights of Australia and England, the two founder members.

Over a decade later, under Imran's leadership, Pakistan proposed and introduced neutral umpires for Test cricket. Kardar's constitutional demands were unmet until 1993, by which time Imran's career had run its course, but both men were outspoken reformers of international cricket, acutely aware of the unfairness and discrimination institutionalised in cricket's governance, a relic of the imperial roots of the game. Neither man was reluctant to challenge authority. Like Kardar, Imran's leadership ambitions did not end with cricket. During his playing days, Imran was sometimes called the King of Pakistan. Today, he merely seeks to become its first minister.

Long intervals separated the great leaders of Pakistan cricket, a testament to the complexity of the role and the immense personal attributes required to lead a viper's nest of a cricket nation. Twenty-four years separated the captaincy of Kardar and Imran; there were almost 30 between Imran and Misbah.

Those intervening decades hurt Pakistan. In the first interval, the national team meandered. From a promising start under Kardar, Pakistan became a support act, a curious bunch with big hair and luxurious moustaches, easy enough to roll over. In the second, from Imran to Misbah, deep wounds were self-inflicted. Pakistan were now a superficial team of Flash Harrys with skin-deep principles. External factors also caused damage. Terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 and Lahore in 2009 condemned them to international exile. Its cricket infrastructure was decimated by decades of maladministration and political interference. The nation itself was a wreck, destabilised by the post-9/11 Afghan war. In these dark days, Misbah's emergence was both surprising and serendipitous. His subsequent progress with the Test team and his survival as captain are a wonder of modern sport.

But the arguments in favour of Pakistan's three great leaders are easily put. Eyewitness accounts speak of Kardar's leadership, how he inspired his teammates and encouraged young players. A new cricket nation, as Pakistan was in 1952, usually waits for a first win, but Kardar delivered success in his country's inaugural series. Two years later he led Pakistan to a famous and unimaginable Test victory at The Oval. In the five years of his captaincy, Pakistan beat every Test nation. A new country took its first steps in the world.

Imran led from the front, an archetypal inspirational captain. Despite an inferior win percentage to Javed, Imran's leadership transformed every Pakistan Test team. An Imran team was fearless in its pursuit of victory, and fought every inch to prevent defeat, to establish itself as an international force. The captain himself led the charge or the rearguard with bat or ball. Imran's Test wins may look unimpressive – 14 in 48 games – but his teams rarely lost. He led Pakistan to first-ever series victories in India and England, momentous milestones, but it was two drawn series against the greatest Test team in cricket's history, the West Indians of the 1980s, that were his most significant achievement. While every other nation cowered and withered in the face of West Indies, Imran challenged them head on and almost toppled them. When Imran's team won a Test, his mood and

attitude were such that it felt as if the nation itself had progressed.

Some statistics may support Misbah's claims to great leadership. The most Test wins of any Pakistan captain. Only two series defeats in 18. But more Tests are now played each year, even by Pakistan, and eight of those series have been in Dubai or the United Arab Emirates, a caricature of Pakistani conditions. What do the statistics really tell us? It probably depends on whether you love Misbah or loathe him. No other Pakistani captain has polarised opinion so sharply. An unemotional analysis tells us that Misbah has improved Pakistan's Test cricket, even as the talent pool has dried up and the limited-overs team has gone backwards. No other captain has endured such severe and persistent challenges. No other captain has been so misunderstood. Misbah has kept Pakistan cricket from the precipice just as the nation has clung on in these disastrous times.

These three surpass any other Pakistan captain in excelling at the toughest job in international sport. Kardar, Imran and Misbah are not simply cricket captains: they are national leaders. Each has his own appeal and attributes. Each has moulded Pakistan's national team into his own image, providing stability and success. Of the three, Imran's transformative influence was perhaps the greatest, firmly establishing Pakistan as a major Test nation. His mass appeal was unrivalled, and he was a role model for generations to come. Every Pakistan captain that followed, up to Inzamam-ul-Haq's retirement, was an acolyte of Imran. Imran is a reference point for every Pakistan captain. Don't believe the statistics for they will mislead you: whoever saw Imran captain Pakistan knows his leadership will be hard to equal.

Indeed, if history tells us anything, we might have to wait another 20 or 30 years before another great Pakistan captain emerges. Each nation has its legendary captains and leaders, but no other international captain has to juggle politics, social issues, international aspirations, and mass obsessional following in the way Pakistan captains do. Place those circumstances on the quicksand of job insecurity and administrative and institutional failure, and you begin to appreciate why being the captain of the Pakistan cricket team is the hardest job in world sport.

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BLIND CRICKET: A PAST AND FUTURE TALE

James Coyne explores the state of the game

On 8 July 2003, Lt Pawan Ghimire was a week past his 25th birthday. The patrol he was leading along the Kalikot–Jumla road in the Himalayas was on its way back to base. A ceasefire had been signed by the Nepalese Army and the Maoist party, but Ghimire's unit was on hostile territory: communist guerrillas had withdrawn to the hills and valleys, from where they intended to launch their assault on the old order. As the trail narrowed, Ghimire triggered an improvised explosive, and he was knocked to the ground. His unit was ambushed by guerrillas and, when he awoke, he found his left eye dangling down by his cheek. "I knew I had lost my sight. The first thing that came to my mind was how I was going to become a burden for my mother." He was airlifted to hospital, and on to India for further specialist treatment, but his optic nerves had been infected, and there was nothing the doctors could do. Ghimire, promoted to major, slumped into a deep depression, from which he would not emerge for three years. "To lose vision is the most traumatic thing you can imagine. I thought there was nothing left. I was just wandering around in despair." His mother cried every time his condition was mentioned, and his father became consumed by shame. "I thought he would become a general, and I felt like a failure. There can be no worse pain in the world."

Until then, Ghimire had been merely a casual cricket fan: one among thousands of Nepalese youngsters who came across ODIs beamed over from Sharjah in the 1990s. Then, in August 2006, Agha Shaukat Ali, the late chairman of the Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC), sent two representatives, Syed Sultan Shah and Abdul Razzaq, on a mission. These men, none with full sight, twigged that with cricket spiralling in popularity throughout Nepal, and most of the country's blind schools situated around the cities of Kathmandu and Pokhara, they had a potential cricketing nursery on their doorstep. The two Pakistanis gave 33 men and boys a crash course in underarm blind cricket, and left behind four bats and 20 balls of hardened white plastic that rattled like maracas. Ghimire dragged this kitbag across Kathmandu, petitioning clubs and schools to put on cricket for the visually impaired. He would stage weekend matches on any open space with a surface flat enough. To lure players in, he offered free snacks or match awards of 100 to 200 rupees, funded by whatever means possible – even by delving into his own army pension.

Initially, girls stayed on the sidelines, many no doubt fearing the consequences of playing sport alongside boys. Some parents would ask for compensation for letting their daughters play. Such attitudes are slowly being driven out, as sceptics begin to grasp what can be achieved: when Nepal made their debut at a major blind tournament, the 2012 Twenty20 World Cup in Bangalore, they fielded the only two female players, Roopa Balal and Bhagwati Bhattarai. There are now said to be around 150 more in Nepal, alongside 400 males. An up-and-coming Associate in mainstream cricket, Nepal has become a trailblazer in the world blind game, and for women's rights at home: the Cricket Association of the Blind in Nepal are the only organisation in the country to have signed the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport. They formed the first national women's blind team, but had no one to play against until a side from the Change Foundation, based in Surrey, flew to Kathmandu in October 2014 to contest the closest thing to an international blind series between two all-women's teams. Nepal ran out 3-0 winners, prompting a giddy local media to declare that they had "whitewashed the UK" – a pardonable exaggeration. Their euphoria rubbed off on Nepal's Ministry for Youth and Sports, who rewarded each player with 10,000 rupees (around £66); further afield, the ECB were jolted into reviewing their own female disability cricket strategies. "Yes, we beat the UK," says Ghimire. "But more than winning or losing we defeated the social perspective. You see, in Nepal, blind people have been perceived as 'the living dead', afraid to cross the street or go to the shops; their families are ashamed to show them even to their neighbours. They were the runt of the litter. Now they are taking pride of place."

On 25 April, a magnitude-eight earthquake ripped through Nepal, followed by regular aftershocks, causing devastation to all but the strongest buildings. More than 9,000 people are thought to have been killed, and as many as 23,000 injured. Reports have emerged of blind people sitting motionless while buildings shook around them, and carefully feeling their way around the remains of the Dharahara – once a 200ft white tower that offered a panorama of Kathmandu, now reduced to a stump – to get their heads around the scale of the damage. Mercifully, no blind cricketers are thought to have died, but an estimated 20 have lost their homes. Ghimire has put cricket on hold as he works on building temporary shelters for the visually impaired.

The history of disability cricket is one of quiet determination in the face of mainstream indifference. EW Swanton's princely *Barclays World of Cricket*, last published in 1986, is still probably the most comprehensive single book on cricket ever printed. Netta Rheinberg wrote with authority on the women's game, and Philip Snow's vignettes from the Pacific Islands were ahead of their time. But, on cricket played by the blind, deaf or physically disabled, it says nothing. Yet, as far back as 1796, a match at Walworth between one-legged and one-armed Greenwich pensioners had to be halted after the crowd broke down the gates, causing injuries in the crush. Play still resumed three hours later; after all, there were 1,000 guineas at stake.

The Great War left the British Empire with a generation of wounded servicemen, many of them still keen to play sport. In 1922, two employees at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) in Melbourne collected a handful of pebbles in a tin can and took turns hitting it with a stick. It is said they were inspired by listening to radio commentary of a Test match – and the date does tally roughly with the first live broadcasts of cricket. In partitioned India, the coverage gradually incorporated Hindi and Urdu, opening the game up to the masses. "I took inspiration from listening to the commentary on radio," says Razzaq, who captained Pakistan to Blind World Cup titles in 2002 and 2006. "I would be glued to it, waiting to hear how our legends like Javed Miandad performed out there in the middle. Just listening to how he would unleash his strokes made me want to perform for my country as well."

The appeal of such an aesthetic pastime to the visually impaired makes sense once you understand that blind cricket is a game of sound. The bowler is obliged to shout "ready?" before he or she delivers the audible ball, which must bounce once in each half of the pitch; the partially sighted wicket-keeper, crouching behind metal stumps, barks instructions to the bowler and the fielders. Batsmen, who never wear helmets, crouch down as low as they can, so as to listen for the slightest deviation off the pitch, and sweep and scoop accordingly. "Most sports are just a roar and a blur, but cricket has a distinctness," wrote Peter White, the blind BBC radio journalist, in *Wisden 2012*. "Bat on ball, ball on pad, ball on bail… cricket really is slow and separated enough for those sounds to be distinct. But the real fascination for many blind people, I believe, is statistical. The numbers allow you to know the game inside out, as completely as anyone who can see: the runs/wickets/time equation is always there."

As each Test-playing country developed their own blind game in isolation, each took on distinctive national characteristics. The RVIB workshop became renowned for producing baskets, nets and brushes for use in the Australian home. One weaver, Dave Manton, fashioned the first audible cricket ball from cane wicker, bound by wire in two places, with metal pieces encased inside. It was used in the first interstate game between Victoria and New South Wales at Kooyong in 1928. The ball would be soaked in water for up to 24 hours before play, misbehave early in the innings, and needed replacing after every 80 to 100 runs due to the constant battering. Yet it remained the Australian ball of choice for almost half a century, until the arrival of a more durable nylon alternative. When blind schools in Lahore and Karachi began playing in the 1970s, they found the wicker cut up too quickly on their unforgiving surfaces, and briefly experimented with steel balls. "But it was very dangerous," admits Shah, Pakistan's first captain. "There were many injuries." And in pre-liberalised India, boys would improvise with metal pellets encased inside shoe polish or toothpaste tins – until a hardened white plastic ball was invented in the 1980s, hot on the heels of the Packer innovations. It has now been adopted as the international standard. "One does get hurt by it," says one of the ball's developers, ML Mishra, "but it will not break any bones." Only the English stubbornly cling on: their domestic leagues are still played overarm with a jingling size-three football (the latest version made in India, ironically). There is an inclusivity to this bouncier game: a batsman can stand up and play a broader range of recognisable cricket shots, and B1 (totally blind) fielders have a better chance of catching someone off one bounce. But it surely does little for England's international prospects; just like the mainstream side, the blind team have never won the World Cup.

Into this disjointed landscape came an Indian, George Abraham. In 1959, when he was ten months old, he fell ill with meningitis, and lost some of his sight. He was fortunate to have supportive and relatively affluent parents, who sent him to mainstream schools and St Stephen's College, Delhi, and backed his career in advertising. But a visit to a blind school in New Delhi in 1989 left Abraham disillusioned: he encountered a watered-down curriculum and teachers fatalistic about their pupils' life chances. Abraham put his career on hold, and embarked on a nationwide tour to discover what could be done. He was lodging at the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped at Dehradun, in the Himalayan foothills, when he was awoken one morning by a gabble of on-field chatter, and something which sounded like a baby's rattle being thrown about. Abraham opened the curtains to see visually impaired boys playing cricket below: "The kids woke up in the morning and played cricket. They went for breakfast, came back and played cricket… went for classes, came back and played cricket. Only bad light stopped play – and that was because the umpires could see no longer." Here was the outdoor activity that could bind India's blind to mainstream society.

In December 1990, Abraham organised India's first national blind tournament, watched by opposition leader Rajiv Gandhi and Tata Steel chairman Russi Mody. It proved remarkably simple to cajole other cricket-playing nations into the World Blind Cricket Council (WBCC), if slightly less so to get them to agree on a standardised ball and rules. What's more, they were effectively out on their own. The late 1990s may have marked, in Gideon Haigh's estimation, the ICC's brief dalliance with "League of Nations idealism", but any expansionist zeal did not touch disability cricket. The WBCC was a collection of partially sighted volunteers getting by with

whatever governmental or charitable support they could muster. Even today, it is "a world body run off a laptop in someone's kitchen," according to one contemporary official. "What it needs is a global marketing and development strategy." But Abraham won the endorsement of Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, and charmed sponsorship out of big corporates like Coca-Cola, who were so impressed they arranged for him to run a leg with the Olympic torch at Atlanta in 1996. Two years later, Abraham pulled off his dream of a World Cup for the Blind, contested by seven teams over a fortnight in Delhi. There were inevitably some teething problems – not least when the Indian government pulled five lakh of funds at the eleventh hour. And the predictable dominance of B2 (partially blind) and B3 (partially sighted) batsmen, when shoved to the top of the order, led to stratospheric scores across the 40 overs. Champions South Africa won three of their last four games without losing a wicket, with Rory and Scott Field knocking off 336 and 373 in the semi-final and final. Masood Jan's unbeaten 262, in a group game for Pakistan against the South Africans, still stands as the record score in international blind cricket. (The regulations were later tweaked to ensure the four B1 players occupy certain positions, with their runs counting double.) But these were just growing pains. Surely the BCCI would sit up and take notice?

Helen Keller once said, in less enlightened times, that "the only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision". It turns out she didn't know the half of it. Until 2006, when it altered its constitutional objectives, the BCCI's charitable status exempted it from various taxes. After India, England and Australia's revamp of the ICC in early 2014, the BCCI stands to gain vast increases in revenue from the next global TV rights deal. But they have not lifted a finger for Indian disability cricket: alone among the five most powerful ICC Full Members, they have no working relationship with their disability organisations. They did not respond to messages and calls asking them to discuss their stance for this article. "BCCI office-bearers say that in principle they want to support us, but there's been no formal recognition," says GK Mahantesh, secretary-general of the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI). "We've been told there are some constitutional amendments we need to make, but the BCCI don't specify what they are. It's regrettable – we need their support for blind cricket to go to the next level. CABI is in a very bad financial state." Mahantesh is pinning his hopes on the BCCI's dashing new secretary, Anurag Thakur, who has put clear water between himself and ICC president N Srinivasan on this and other issues; he invited India's blind team over for tea after they returned from South Africa last year with the World Cup. But the BCCI are not obliged to do anything. Although disability cricket has cropped up in ICC meetings, there is no mention of it in the 2011–15 Strategic Plan, and nothing binding on Full Members to develop the game in their back yard. "England and Australia have tackled disability cricket head-on, and are doing some brilliant work," says Andy Hobbs, the ICC Development Programmes manager, who has carried out an audit of disability cricket groups round the world. "And the participation figures and standard of cricket in Pakistan is exceptional. But governance standards are mixed, there and elsewhere. Not all disability initiatives are supported by the ICC member board in individual countries. We need to get them aligned – clearly that's the way it should be." Ahead of every Blind World Cup, around half of the WBCC members have to appeal for donations to reach the tournament; many, like Nepal, fall short.

As for a Paralympic panacea, no one has ever seriously bothered to press cricket's case – despite Beijing 2008 and London 2012 reaching a TV audience of 3.8 billion apiece. Some organisations, like CABI, are affiliated to their national Paralympic body; many others are not. "I would argue that cricket is by far the most demanding of any blind sport," says Ian Martin, the ECB's head of disability cricket. "You think of the spatial awareness, the audio skills, the fact there are three disciplines… then shut your eyes. It's phenomenal. You'll never meet anyone who isn't blown away by it. But at the moment cricket is not offering a Paralympic pathway. If you're ten or 11, the image of Jonnie Peacock on the podium is probably more powerful."

For now, blind cricket is kept breathing in the world's biggest cricketing economy by the Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled – a non-profit organisation co-founded by Mahantesh in Bangalore, which provides employment for several Indian players, including national captain Shekhar Naik. He was born completely blind, to parents who worked punishing hours in the paddy fields. Aged eight, he gained some sight in his right eye in freak circumstances, when he fell into a canal and sustained a blow to his temple. But three months later, Naik's father died. He had always been opposed to sending Shekhar to a blind school, but now his mother had her way. She spent the little money she had ferrying him sweets to sustain him during classes and cricket games. He was 12 when she died. He toughened his resolve and threw himself into cricket, putting up with the occasional beatings he received from one coach for simply playing and missing. Since being appointed captain in 2010, Naik has led India to World Cup final victories over Pakistan in both formats, turning him into something of a celebrity. At Samarthanam he met his wife, Roopa, who is also visually impaired. "Mahantesh Sir inspires me physically and mentally," says Shekhar. "He has given me a job, a life… I don't have the words to say any more."

Incredibly, given the wider geopolitical context, India's players look on with some envy at their great rivals to the north-west. There, disability cricket is supported financially by the Pakistan Cricket Board, and the leading players are paid a monthly stipend. Their blind team provide a rare and reliable good-news story: Pakistan are the only country to have appeared in all five World Cup finals, and won seven series in a row up to early 2012. Unlike their able-bodied counterparts, they have not been compelled to exile, either. Between the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009, and Zimbabwe's visit in May 2015, not a single mainstream Full Member side visited Pakistan. But, in November 2011, India's blind cricketers

became the first athletes from their country to visit Pakistan for five years, and have returned several times, defying the advice of politicians and security officials. Pakistan regularly travel to India too; the fixture has become the last repository of a great sporting rivalry. Even so, the PBCC had to postpone the inaugural Blind Asia Cup in May, citing a helicopter crash in northernmost Pakistan, which killed seven people. The participation of Nepal, dealing with the earthquake devastation, had already been in serious doubt.

"The Pakistanis are astoundingly good at blind cricket," says Martin. "They have thousands of players to choose from, and almost all blind people follow cricket. If they're playing for Pakistan, a disabled person's status in their local community can be massive. If they're not, they can be out on the streets." Razzaq, recently appointed Pakistan's coach, was one of several senior players forced into retirement in 2012 following an inquest into twin series defeats in India. He worried that he could no longer provide three meals a day for his family. "I don't have many opportunities now," he said at the time. "As a contracted player, I used to get 12,000 rupees a month [around £80] and, 2,000 for every match. I won't be getting that anymore." In 2009, the UK Border Agency refused visas to the touring Pakistan squad, on the grounds they could not guarantee they would all return home. "After every World Cup I'll receive emails from Pakistani players asking to come and play in England," says Martin. "They speak to our guys and realise it's more socially welcoming over here – even though the PCB pays their players and we don't. The vast majority of ours have jobs already. And disabled people in Britain, quite rightly, might have any number of aspirations. There's nothing stopping a blind person going right to the top of government – look at David Blunkett."

The ECB's support for disability cricket has been one of their incontestable achievements during the years of plenty. There is a financial carrot: the ECB's funding from Sport England – £27.5m over the current four-year cycle – depends on its success spreading women's and disability cricket. But administrators are adamant they have done so because it is right. In 2006, before the ECB's close involvement, the England blind players set up camp outside a tube station, asking commuters to spare some change to help fund their trip to the World Cup in Pakistan. They made it up to the required amount thanks to a London cabbie, who suggested one couple donate their airport fare to the cricketers' cause. Soon after the squad reached Pakistan, a group of senior players led a mutiny against the coach, Andy Sellins, and deposed him mid-tour. Clearly it was time for the ECB to act. In October 2007, Martin was appointed as the first full-time paid administrator responsible for disability cricket in a mainstream board; two years later the ECB succeeded in bringing all the various disability groups under its wing. England now lead the way in the facilities, coaching and supplementary support they provide for their elite players. When he lost his sight at 16 due to a retinal detachment, Mo Khatri would spend hours sitting alone in the family living-room in Leicester. He says going down to his local blind cricket club turned his life around: eight years on, he is England's top B1 batsman, and even climbed Mt Kilimanjaro last autumn, after completing his Masters degree in Philosophy. Besides that, Khatri is presumably the only cricketer to have triggered a change in Islamic law: in 2008, his situation prompted the Muslim Sharia Council UK to issue a *fatwa* ruling that visually impaired Muslims were permitted to keep guide dogs, and could use them to travel to the mosque for prayers.

The mainstream push continues: in May, England played India in a Twenty20 blind international at The Oval; and the ECB have pledged to stage a disability fixture on the undercard of a men's Twenty20 game by 2017, an innovation which has already done so much for women's cricket. The ECB's successful bid to host the 2019 World Cup incorporated a concurrent disability tournament for the leading nations – something that former chief executive David Collier had been advocating at ICC board level for years, without much progress. "We're walking the walk at the ECB," says Martin. "Sports bodies in the UK are under a lot of pressure to be inclusive towards disabilities. But I find it regrettable that an organisation that sets itself up as a world body [the ICC] are doing very little for a significant section of the global population. My philosophy is: if you can play cricket at Everest base camp or on the top of Kilimanjaro, you can't have people in local communities without access to the game."

The ICC's involvement would not be a silver bullet. They cannot be expected to cut through deep-seated cultural issues. But they are the only global body capable of turning disability cricket into a truly global operation, so that Pawan Ghimire no longer has to worry if Nepal can afford to attend a World Cup. Many say that disability cricket lags a decade behind the women's game. It is instructive then, that 2015 marks ten years since the ICC took on the running of women's international cricket, helping turn it into the semi-professional, marketable product it is today. Whether or not disability cricket has a similar potential, it needs help. If cricket's administrators choose not to, history may not judge them kindly.

For information about how to pledge money to the Nepal Earthquake Relief Fund, visit www.globalgiving.co.uk/projects/nepal-earthquake-relief-fund/

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YORKSHIRE'S OTHER BRIAN CLOUGH

Crispin Andrews on a lesser-known hero

When the Bradford Industrial Museum held a special exhibition celebrating 107 years of Bradford League cricket in 2010, a special name took centre stage.

Not Sir Leonard Hutton, who played for Pudsey St Lawrence. Nor Jack Hobbs, Herbert Sutcliffe or Frank Woolley – all three played in the league during the First World War when there was no first-class cricket. Not even Sidney Barnes, though the contract he signed with Saltaire in 1921 was part of the exhibit.

Martin Crowe, Matthew Hoggard, VVS Laxman and Mohammed Yousuf were just four modern-day greats among 152 Test players who turned out for Bradford League clubs over the last century. The name that rang out loudest, though, was that of Brian Clough – not the controversial Nottingham Forest and Derby manager, but Bradford's very own Brian Clough.

Yorkshire's other Brian Clough played in the League for a record 61 years, scoring 10,347 runs for Spen Victoria, Lightcliffe, Bradford and Bowling Old Lane.

Clough passed away on 28 January this year after a short illness – he was 82. From his first game for Spen Victoria second XI as a short-trouser-wearing 11-year-old to his last league game for Bowling Old Lane's second XI, at 72, Clough lived and breathed Bradford cricket. He was a clever and effective – if not stylish – batsman, a useful bowler and a fearless fielder. But most of all Clough is remembered in Bradford for his cerebral captaincy.

He was born in Bradford in 1933, two years before another Mrs Clough from Middlesbrough had her more famous son. Nottingham Forest's Brian took to cricket before football; the Bradford version too had a bat in his hand soon after he could walk. "I was three when I started playing in the backstreet," Clough told me a couple of years ago. "It was different back then. Not as much living space as we have now and no gardens. If you hit a ball in the air, it'd have to be straight or it would hit the side of the neighbouring house – the houses were that close together."

During the 1930s, Yorkshire and England were strong. Despite Bradman, England won the Ashes in 1932–33 – and in 1930 and 1938 the series went down to the last game. Herbert Sutcliffe, Percy Holmes and Hedley Verity helped Yorkshire win the Championship seven times. But, for the young Clough, there was only one Yorkshire and England cricketer: Len Hutton.

Two years after Clough made his backstreet debut, Hutton was putting the Aussies to the sword at The Oval, making a world-record 364 as England racked up 903 for 7. Seventy-two years later, Clough's own bat would feature at the exhibition alongside the one Hutton used that day – Hutton's bat was on loan from the Lord's museum. Clough told me it was among the proudest moments of his life.

Hutton's three brothers – George, Reggie and Edmund – also played for Pudsey.

Clough remembers watching Len score 30 as Pudsey struggled to 60 all out on a dodgy wicket. Later, as a 12-year-old, Clough bowled George with his off spin. Two years on, Clough played against one of the game's greatest – West Indian superstar Learie Constantine, who worked for the UK Ministry of Labour and National Service as a welfare officer during the Second World War. Constantine was 44 when the war ended, his first-class career behind him. But the great all-rounder who had helped West Indies to their first Test and series victories, over England in the 1930s, still managed to turn out for Windhill in the Bradford League in 1947.

Clough was in his prime as a batsman and captain during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Yorkshire were once again strong: Brian Close, Ray Illingworth, Fred Trueman and Geoff Boycott starred as they won seven Championships and two Gillette Cups between 1959 and 1969. Clough, then captain of Bowling Old Lane, subscribed to the same uncompromising, hard-edged cricket.

Like Close, Clough would position himself at silly mid off, although perhaps not as dangerously near the batsman. He led from the front – intimidating the other team with attacking field placings – and was a master at getting the best out of his players. He was, in fact, a stickler when it came to field settings, making sure his fielders did not deviate from the position he had marked on the ground. In Malcolm Shackleton and Harry Ryder, Clough had two of the quickest and best bowlers in the league, easily as good as some of the county players.

Those who played against Clough say he had an uncanny knack of introducing unsung bowlers into the attack, to capture a vital wicket or break a difficult partnership. Doug Padgett, the Yorkshire and England cricketer who played under Clough at Bowling Old Lane, remembers with fondness his great passion for, and

knowledge of, the game: "He was an excellent league cricketer, not far short of playing first-class cricket. If he'd been given the chance, I'm sure he would have done well."

Former teammate Barry Jenkinson recalls turning up late after a tea break: "Brian told me he was dropping me from No.4 to 11 in the batting order." As it turns out, Jenkinson had to go in when the team collapsed. "After the match I heard some of the spectators saying it was tactical genius by Clough to put me at No.11 to play for the draw."

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One dreary Sunday in 1961, Clough was captaining Spen WRATS Cricket Club. In his side was a young bloke from Fitzwilliam. "Brilliant bat, interesting character," was Clough's initial assessment of Geoffrey Boycott. After that day, his opinion hardened: "The most difficult person I've ever had to deal with on a cricket field."

Clough recalled that Boycott, yet to make his Yorkshire debut, was already throwing his weight around. "He wanted to bat all day, for himself not the team, and then he'd want to bowl," Clough said. "You couldn't let him have his own way, or he'd run riot." Boycott also thought he ought to field in the most important position – cover point – because he was the best fielder in the side. Instead, Clough dismissed Boycott to square leg with a chuckle.

Clough knew something Boycott didn't: there was a leaky pipe under the ground just off the square. A few overs later, a bedraggled Boycott ran up to the skipper to complain. "He was wet through. He had a Yorkshire Colts game the next day and had only packed one pair of whites."

While Clough is remembered mostly for his captaincy, he was no slouch with the bat. He rated his century at Brighouse, when he outscored opening partner Doug Padgett, as his best performance. Apparently, after Clough raised his bat that day, nearby fielders heard him mumble: "Doug Padgett, Yorkshire and England: 42 not out. Plain Brian Clough of Bowling Old Lane: 100 not out."

Clough usually had two bats – one for hooking, another for driving. This was long before manufacturers started to make bats with sweet spots higher or lower to suit back- and front-foot players. Clough's other habit, tying his gloves to the bat handle, however, hasn't caught on.

During his later years, Clough was chairman, president and club stalwart at Bowling Old Lane. Ralph Middlebrook, who played for the club in the 1990s, says Clough was one of the finest club workers he'd ever known. "For a while we had no water at the club so Brian would collect all the dirty crockery after tea and take it to the home of a lady living nearby to do the washing-up."

Clough was so in love with the game that he could never get enough. His colleagues at Bowling Old Lane say his weekly ritual involved being at the ground every Saturday for a league match. On Sunday, he'd find a game in Yorkshire or Derbyshire, often asking people to Google addresses for him, and being absolutely miserable if the rain played spoilsport.

Clough also enjoyed passing on his experience and knowledge to the club's youngsters, telling them stories about the days when Bowling Old Lane – now a second-division side – were top of the league.

Haqueq Siddique, Bowling Old Lane's second-team captain, remembers Clough's other area of expertise: jam-making. "He'd have us all picking blackberries, particularly the youngsters. He'd take them home, make the jam and bring it back for everyone." So popular was his jam that club members once printed Clough's mug on sticky labels and stuck the labels to jam jars, calling it Clough's Yorkshire Jam.

Brian Clough played his very last game in a Dads v Lads match at Bowling Old Lane. In the opposition were Clough's grandsons, Sam and Daniel. Clough's son, David, was away reporting on England for the Press Association. That year, Daniel led Spen Victoria's under-11 team to victory in the Bradford Junior League with a game to spare.

Brian Clough played in, and followed, the Bradford League for over 70 years. "They cover pitches these days and have great big bats that can smash the ball," he told me. "When I played, on uncovered wickets, if you got 500 runs in a season you'd be pleased. Now the top league players get more than 750."

For Clough, though, one thing never changed about his beloved Bradford League. "Best League in the country," he said. "Most competitive. Highest standard." He would know.

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TIME TO THINK

Tim Beard on cricket

Standing like a

Morris Minor driven by a maiden aunt
Bulbous and prone to unpredictable signals
Heron or hawk stalking six by six spindly speed
Waiting for prey to pass trundling grassy by
Scarecrow two hats and irregular
Profile often akimbo
Tree choosing this spot to take root
To test out broadening branch formations
Lollipop lady in disputed popping channels
Waving combatants across creases in the pavement
Weather vane swivelling to the lines of
Occasional drizzle, light meters and heavy showers
Six coins, five sandwiches, four cups of tea
Three shakes of the head, two beers and one handshake each
And a long warm bath back at home
Happily rewinding the day's play

Attrition

In car parks and in alleyways
On corridors, in gardens and by garage walls
The bounce of the ball may well beat the bat
But the bat is the bigger boy to begin with
And their brothers will become bowlers
I'll be Boycott and you can earn your turn
Peeling away at the top of your run-up
By the flower bed or stairwell
Bowling to local regulation fields such
As a cover clothes line carousel and a rockery of slips
A hedge behind square and past the arm to the kitchen steps
Me with my trench at the crease
And years later your tireless pace is still a bit medium
While my spin is slower and slower
Developed because your desire to get in and stay in
was stronger and if
I would bat long I would have to bowl
even longer

Howzat said his beer

Howzat said his beer
as I popped the top
off for the opposing captain
Howzat said mine
as we looked each other in the eye
he thinking perhaps of
that big shout that went our way
and I of the one we were sure about
All's fair, we said and drank
and watched the youngster amble round
for the flags a few feet apart
Enjoyed that, your spinner's a good 'un
Cheers yeah, nice day I'd have to say
Good of your lads to let us know
for that last catch much appreciated
see you over at ours next year

Thanks skipper

Turn right before the lights please
and just park on the grass wherever
our changing is the one on the left
and we meet about an hour before
Geoff does the warm-ups
It makes us feel good
and sometimes wrongfoots the oppo
after the toss we do what we need
it's good of you to step in, we'll be doing our best
yes we will, to make you feel welcome
we have our little ways and here are a few
because you're never alone with your whites on
Bob's in a band and he goes mid-off
He counts in the others, midwicket and extra
and they do the squeezing all afternoon
And two always chase, so
down at fine leg there'll be work for you
towards every cow corner and
up at square leg Big Tonkers might wander
so you'll have to remind him,
there's a slip and a gully
that's me and my brother, mostly we catch them
old Rodney's at cover just always been him
needs a bit of a boost if he dives and he misses
which he most often does, so give him a hand
if you're passing, that's how we'll start
Andy will open, despite his bad back
and Phil's got the gloves on, you'll know that by now
you'll have the next over, the field is the same
just chuck a few down there, we'll do the rest
Godders at mid-on he does the shining
you'll get a good spell, then we'll get you a drink
Old George is the umpire, he's a bit deaf
it's better that way, we've found over time
and when it's all over you can buy me a pint
oh and you'll be batting at nine

Throwing it all away

It's the end of a long career
And you've nicked another good one
And there's a bin by the pavilion gate

It's just another of those rows
About the same old
Is it about you
Or is it about us
And this time us have had enough
And tip the whole lot
Into a car park skip

It's at the back of the shed
And no kids have lived in this house for years

Or in a moulding golf bag
Hidden because loved
And forgotten for the same reason
With a putter
And rusty three iron

Left in the showers
After being lent out
And broken by another
Who hit the ball
When we used to want to caress it

Walking in

I am watching you
Because I want to see
If you will do those things
That mean it will be me
Whose heart will jump
And who will take in his hands
The gift you are trying to keep away
The less it is me
The more I want it to be

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TURN LEFT AT BEDSER CLOSE

Will Macpherson is drawn into the Kennington Park Estate

God knows what I was doing there, or why the small rectangular sign on the side of the red-brick building caught my eye. But catch it it did. *Lohmann* House.

Perhaps it was where I was – a stone's throw from The Oval – or perhaps it was something I had been reading that week. Or maybe it was just the reserves of knowledge stored in the depths of the cricket-lover's brain. I knew that name, and my proximity to the ground meant it had to be George Lohmann, he of the comical bowling average in the late-19th century.

It seemed odd though – even given the location – that his name would sit on the side of a block in a nondescript council estate. An enquiring mind (read: I was bored, short on plans and had a battery-less phone) led me to take a quick poke around the rest of the estate. On each of these monotonous but not wholly unattractive buildings – some of which have views out to the middle – that sprawl round the streets on the north-eastern side of the cricket ground, from Kennington Park Road up to the gasworks, was an equivalent sign. Abel House rang bells, Lockwood House felt relevant, and Grace House began to join the dots. There's a link here, surely? Like any self-respecting web-reared twentysomething who thinks he's onto something, I resolved to Google it when I got home (only that dead phone stopped me doing so sooner).

It turns out I was right. Lohmann House was named after George Lohmann, of England and Surrey in the late-19th century. Lohmann earned his extraordinary figures of 18 Tests and 112 wickets at 10.75 – the best average of anybody to play more than two Tests – through miserly, inventive, nibbling, nagging seamers, delivered from every angle on the crease and at nothing more than medium pace but moving both ways, varying speed and flight, and

always landing on the money. In all, he took 1,221 wickets for Surrey and was a steady bat, a supreme slipper and one of the inaugural Wisden Cricketers of the Year in 1889. In the sixth of his ten years as a Test cricketer, however, he contracted tuberculosis, which saw him winter in South Africa, sapped his strength, slowed his career and, eventually, killed him at just 36 years of age.

What of the rest, then? The estate's tenants and residents association website confirms that it is made up of "12 five-storey blocks built in the 1930s by the then London County Council" and that "most of the blocks and many of the surrounding streets are named after cricketing greats". Many who've walked to The Oval from Vauxhall will have noticed little Bedser Close, but many of the names that adorn the estate – which lies on the opposite side of the ground – are far less well known and date further back. After some trawling of *Wisdens*, Kennington Park Estate acts as a neat – and unlikely – walking tour of early modern cricket.

Two down from Lohmann on the list of Surrey wicket-takers is one of the names I'd recognised: Lockwood. Bill Lockwood was an apprentice of Lohmann, having moved to London from Nottingham. For a man with 1,182 wickets to his name, Lockwood's was a topsy-turvy career. He was much quicker than Lohmann, generating nip and pace off the pitch to cannon the ball into the batsman's leg, and possessed a fearsome slower ball. Lockwood formed a devilish partnership with the man atop Surrey's wicket-taking list with 1,775, Tom Richardson, and was the deadliest bowler Ranjitsinhji faced, according to the man himself, but a tricky and troubled character. Life was tough on and off the field on England's tour of Australia in 1894–95; he never adapted to the climate and conditions, taking no more than a single wicket in an innings, while narrowly avoiding both drowning and losing a hand. To top things off, when he returned from his disastrous tour, his wife and one of his children died. As he sought refuge in drink, he ballooned, his career floundered and he found himself out of the Surrey side. Eventually the county persuaded him to go teetotal, he got himself in shape and made a fine comeback, taking 134 wickets in 1898 and playing Test cricket again until 1902, despite another brief dalliance with drink around the turn of the century. Even Jesse Ryder would blush at a career so drama-filled.

There are more, of course. WG Grace needs no introduction, while the other name I semi-recognised, Bobby Abel, was a patient and unconventional but prolific batsman who "gathered runs like blackberries everywhere he goes," according to CB Fry. His eyesight eventually curtailed his career and rendered him stone blind in his dotage. Another with a house to his name is Abel's teammate Bill Brockwell, a bowling contemporary of Richardson, Lohmann and Lockwood – a truly fearsome quartet – who won eight Championships and tied another. Brockwell was another to fall on hard times, dying in abject poverty in Richmond in the mid-1930s.

Many more of that Surrey vintage are commemorated on the estate. Key House is named after county captain Kingsmill Key, while Read House could be either WW or Maurice Read. The latter Read was an extremely popular batsman and occasional quick bowler. He made his debut in the game that gave rise to the Ashes, the Oval Test of 1882 and was an England regular for a decade in the 1880s and early '90s. Read was also thick as thieves with Lohmann and the pair were known to lark about together in the field. The other Read, Walter, played for Surrey between 1873 and 1897, but died less than a decade later. A batsman, whose only Test century came from No.10, his match-saving 117 against the Australians at The Oval in 1884 coming in less than two hours, with just 36 scoring shots. It is this Read whom *Wisden* credits as being the mainstay – along with Lohmann – of the Surrey revival in the 1880s under the captaincy of John Shuter, Key's predecessor.

The Council Houses Cricketers so far, with the exception of Grace, followed Lohmann as Surrey players, with all but Kingsmill Key named Wisden Cricketers of the Year in the 1890s. For the other names, like Gloucestershire's Grace (who won in 1896), we need to look further afield than The Oval. Mordecai Sherwin, the really very plump – 5ft 9in and 17 stone – Nottinghamshire wicket-keeper who won the award in 1891 and was considered the best gloveman in the land (and also kept goal for Notts County), has Sherwin House, while Blythe House is named after Colin "Charlie" Blythe who was a Cricketer of the Year in 1904, alongside Plum Warner. Blythe was a left-arm spinning master of a slightly later generation than the rest, one of the standout bowlers of the "golden era". A violinist and epilepsy sufferer, he took 2,210 wickets at 16.67 for Kent and would have taken many more had he not been killed at Passchendaele. Hornby House is named after batsman Albert "Monkey" Hornby of Lancashire, England's captain in that fateful, Ashes-creating Test at The Oval in 1882. Hornby also played football for Blackburn Rovers and rugby for England, and is one of only two men to captain England in rugby and cricket. With all that decoration, one imagines he kept his Test batting average of 3.5 to himself when in the company of his grandchildren.

The final two blocks, Alverstone and Blades, which sit at the estate's southern tip, are not as obviously cricketing, and more tricky to uncover because they're veiled by titles, not surnames. The former was Richard Webster, 1st Viscount Alverstone, a barrister who served as Surrey President from 1895 until his death in 1915 (and MCC President in 1903) and wrote a series of histories of Surrey Cricket. Blades is Sir Rowland Blades, known as First Baron Ebbisham, whose brief *Wisden* obituary in 1954 describes him as "a great lover of cricket who continued active participation in the game till he was well into the seventies" and captained the Lords and Commons team. He was a member at Surrey for six decades and Lord Mayor of London in the 1920s.

There was more yet, though. On the other side of the ground, to its south-west, lie three more houses, stumbled upon equally accidentally, but even more eye-catchingly monikered than Lohmann House. On the neighbouring Ashmole Estate – which is currently undergoing a facelift – lies a council block named

in honour of John Wisden, he of the Almanack, alongside Shrewsbury House and Stoddart House. A fine bowler and a steady batsman, Wisden was a small man who played for Sussex (where he was born), Kent and Middlesex and managed to clean bowl all 10 wickets when representing South v North in 1950. A year after retiring due to rheumatism in 1863, he launched the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, and died two decades later of cancer.

When asked who he'd most like in his side, Grace was quick to select Arthur Shrewsbury of Nottinghamshire and England, and the Doctor's greatest rival as the world's finest batsman in the 1880s. Shrewsbury was known as a master of "sticky wickets" with the firmest of defences built around his pad, and was a quiet, reserved man, who reached a tragic end in May 1903, as he shot himself after a long battle with his health. County Durham-born Stoddart – like Hornby – was a dual rugby and cricket international, who played in the three-quarters and excelled with the bat, holding a world record for his score of 485 (in 370 minutes) for Hampstead against Stoics in 1886, all after dancing and playing poker until dawn.

An eclectic bunch, then, on either side of the ground: cricketers of repute from Surrey and beyond, all of whom enjoyed their moments at The Oval for England, a pair of Surrey stalwarts – in the stands and in the committee room – and the man who gave us the books that would document them all.

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Very well then. I'd found an explanation for the sign that caught my eye, and I'd even found some more on the other side of the ground. I rather liked it – it's unique, trivial and individual and perhaps, when a little thought goes into it, not all that surprising. The Oval and all of Surrey's and much of England's rich history with the game lies next door, after all.

These were blocks built in the 1930s, a time, so I'm told by local historians and archivists, when London County Council – for it was they who named the blocks, not the Lambeth borough council – sought unusual, inventive and locally relevant names for new streets, blocks and houses. The council was under pressure from both the Post Office and Emergency Services, who sought originality to improve their services and ensure they ended up at the correct location more often. London didn't need another Church Road, it seemed. It is unclear exactly why the cricketers selected were selected, beyond their links to the game or the ground. It is not obvious, for instance, why there is no Richardson House, in honour of the county's leading wicket-taker, and a behemoth of the era.

One of the *Wisden Almanack*'s more peculiar annual pleasures is a delve into the Cricketana section – often as entertaining as it is enlightening. There's some remarkable stuff out there and, even in 2015, a huge market for all manner of randomness associated with the game. Likewise, there are many buildings and fixed objects that house that cricketana – intentionally or not – that are named after cricketers: stadiums, stands, streets, pavilions, pubs, gates and more. Yet this, social housing, home to a few thousand people – many of whom will know nothing more of cricket than the fact it is played next door – is up there with the oddest. Perhaps the roundabouts named after Weekes, Walcott and Sobers on the ABC Highway and the fourth nearby after Frank Worrell in Barbados are as quirky, but Kennington Park Estate is pretty good. There'll be more wondrous weirdness elsewhere, no doubt, I'm just yet to stumble across it.

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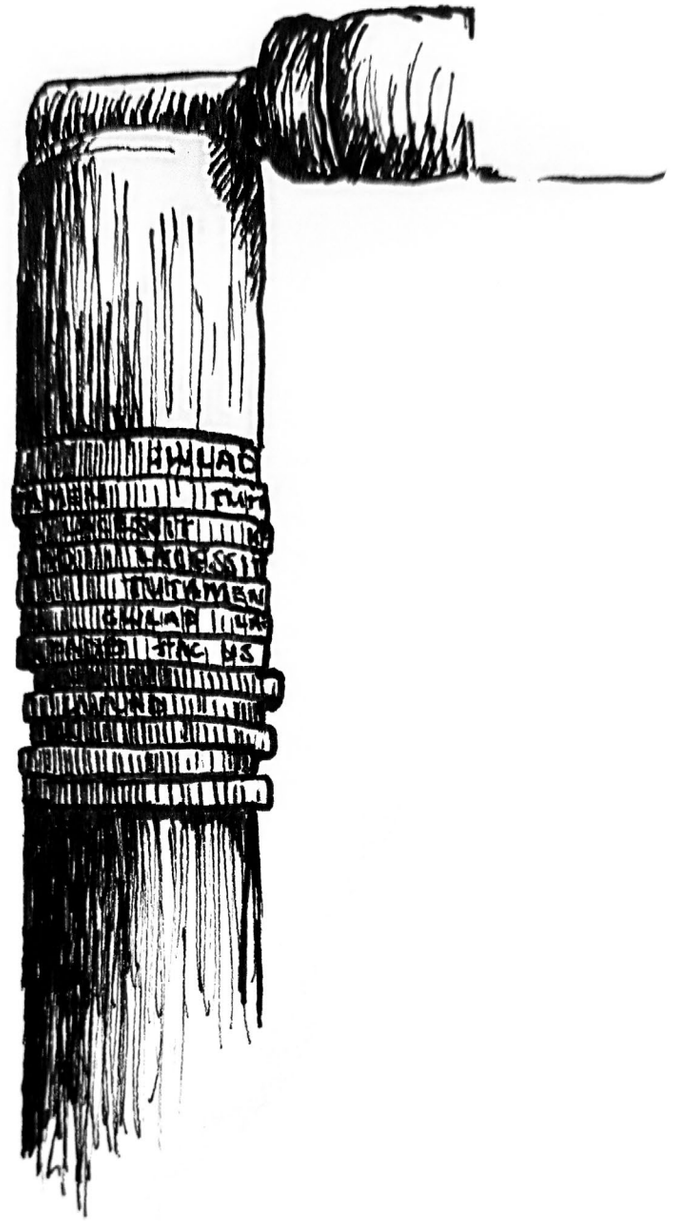

A GAMBLER'S LEGACY

Jonathan Rice on the not-so-priestly Rev Charles Powlett

"If the notches of one player are laid against another, the Bet depends on both innings, unless otherwise specified. If one party beats the other in one innings, the notches in the first innings shall determine the bet, But if the party goes in a second time, then the Bet must be determined by the number on the score."

This final law in the code drawn up on 25 February 1774 by a committee of "noblemen and gentlemen of Kent, Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex, Middlesex and London" who met at the Star and Garter in Pall Mall reminds us that gambling and fixed matches are not a new invention. For every wide bowled to the order of a subcontinental bookmaker today, there were matches thrown and wickets given up almost a quarter of a millennium ago. Gambling was for many not so much an adjunct to cricket but the sole reason for it.

One man who narrowly missed out on being a nobleman – and rather less narrowly on being a true gentleman – but who nevertheless was one of the codifiers of cricket at that 1774 gathering, was the sporting priest Rev. Charles Powlett.

Powlett is perhaps the most elusive character in the early history of cricket in England. He has a reputation for having been the main force behind the Hambledon Club for many years during its great days but the evidence for this is scant to say the least. Indeed, his interest in cricket was most likely as a source of income rather than of idle pleasure. In John Nyren's famous book, *Cricketers of My Time*, the author tells the story of his father Richard Nyren helping to pull off an unlikely win for Hambledon from a hopeless position against an England side on Broadhalfpenny Down in 1775. This brilliant victory very much displeased two Hambledon members who had laid off their bets very heavily against a victory for their side. The two members are identified as Powlett and his close friend Philip Dehany, both of a higher social order than the pub landlord Nyren. Nyren's son remarks that "the proud old yeoman [he was

hardly old – just into his 40s] turned short upon them and with that honest independence which gained him the esteem of all parties, told them to their heads that they were rightly served and that he was glad of it." That, and the entries in the Hambledon records which document Powlett's attendance at meetings and his appointment as steward of the club for several years, are all we have for sure about his connection with Hambledon. So what do we know of the man?

Charles Powlett was the illegitimate son of Charles, 3rd Duke of Bolton. A Whig peer, the Duke had been married off to Anne Vaughan, daughter of the 3rd Earl of Carbery, largely for dynastic reasons. But he never cared for her and, as soon as his father died and he became duke in 1722, he left his wife and took up with a string of younger bedfellows.

On 29 January 1728, the 42-year-old Duke attended the first night of John Gay's new musical comedy, *The Beggar's Opera*, in which the person playing the leading role of Polly Peachum was a young girl called Lavinia Fenton. The Duke fell hopelessly and permanently in love.

The play was a huge hit, easily the most successful production in London's history, and well before its final curtain in June Lavinia had become the talk of the town. Pamphlets, portraits and even one scurrilous biography were all produced and eagerly bought by the London public, and everybody knew all about her.

Lavinia was no more moral than any other actress of her time, having started out her professional career in the way that many of fellow actresses did: by using her body as a stepping stone to fame and riches. As her biography noted: "This must be said on her behalf – that she is above asking money for dispensing her favours; and yet not so foolish as to surrender before she sees the glittering bait." Thus it was that when the middle-aged and foolishly romantic Duke of Bolton declared his love for her, Lavinia was ready to listen, despite the fact that she maintained a relationship with a Portuguese nobleman. Within a few months, Lavinia was established as the Duke's mistress, and her first child, Charles Powlett, was born on 28 December 1728.

To skip forward 60 years, Charles and his nephew (also Charles, also a priest) were at loggerheads, largely because the uncle was guardian to the orphaned nephew and would not let him marry the lady of his choice until he had enough money (which he could never quite acquire). The younger Charles was very bitter about what he saw as his uncle's arbitrary ruling, and his surviving letters seethe with dislike for him. One, to his long-suffering fiancée Nancy Temple, says: "His villainies are too black for me to mention, but I begin to think he cannot be a Powlett – indeed he has himself said he is not, but owes his birth to a Portuguese ambassador." Given the timing of his birth and the continuing relationship Lavinia had with the man from Portugal, this seems very likely. Bolton could have been the father if Lavinia became his mistress before the end of March, but the Portuguese ambassador is a far more probable sire, especially if Powlett admitted as much to his nephew. Charles Powlett was thus doubly illegitimate, born out of wedlock and almost certainly not even the son of the man who claimed to be his father.

His official "father", Charles Duke of Bolton lived together happily with Lavinia until the Duke's death in 1754. She had two more sons, both by the Duke, Percy (the younger Charles Powlett's father) and Horatio. The Duke's first wife died in 1751, and as soon as he heard the news he married Lavinia as his second duchess.

Charles Powlett the Hambledon squarson was a bastard by birth and, according to his nephew at least, by nature too. Certainly we can find few positive references to him anywhere. His own letters to his brothers are self-serving and pompous, and his behaviour seems to be most unlike that of a man of the Church. He married twice, firstly to a Miss Elizabeth Gunman in 1755, shortly after he was ordained and only nine months after he had written to his brother Percy that: "they tell me I must marry whenever I get a living. As you know a desire of matrimony was never among my predominant foibles, and… you will easily believe I would willingly dispense with this necessary evil, but as my friends are absolute in their opinion, I must give up mine and make myself miserable to please the world. I am not very good natured and condescending." Despite his disinclination, the marriage to Eliza Gunman lasted until her death over 35 years later, although it produced no children. When his first wife died, he immediately married again, but again the couple were childless. One is tempted to the conclusion that both were marriages of convenience for a man with so many insecurities about his place in Georgian society.

What of his cricket interests? Is there any real substance to the accepted truth that he was a stalwart of the Hambledon club? We know he was a member of the club from the 1770s, and indeed was living in Hampshire from the time of his marriage. We know too that he was a steward of the club in 1774, and again in 1783, 1784, 1789 and 1795, the gap in these years being explained by his absence as incumbent of St Martin's by Looe in Cornwall. However, there is no evidence that he ever played the game, although he was 45 years old when he first became a steward of the club and records are extremely unclear before then. He gambled and he hunted, two regular pastimes for wealthy upper-class gentlemen in the late-eighteenth century, but whether he cared about cricket as anything other than an excuse for a wager seems much more doubtful.

Powlett thought himself an accomplished musician and wrote many hunting songs but, as far as we know, he wrote no cricket songs, despite being well acquainted with the principal composer of cricket songs of the age, the Rev. Reynell Cotton, who was President of the Hambledon Club for 1773–74. If he loved cricket as a game, why did Powlett not write songs in praise of it?

Powlett's love of racing was learnt from his father the duke (a noted breeder of racehorses), and we have evidence in the Powlett correspondence of his

attending the races at Stockbridge in 1790, along with the Prince Regent as one example of his enthusiasm for racing – and for his social status. His surviving letters are also full of gossip but there is no mention of cricket in any of them – a curious omission if Powlett was indeed devoted to the game. Even a passing mention would be the least we might expect.

He did, of course, involve himself in the administration of the game, as befits a man of his position in society. That he was invited to the Star and Garter in 1774 for that lawmaking meeting might be thought to show that he had a high profile at Hambledon at the time, but he was an inveterate social climber and a man with little sensitivity towards other people's feelings, so he might easily have invited himself. The only law created that evening of interest to him was that final one, about "the notches of one player being laid against another".

That was Charles Powlett's true passion – gambling and, although he loved the thrill of a wager, if he could manage the odds in his favour he would always try to do so. I do not believe that he had any real interest in cricket at all. His main contribution to Hambledon was to use his influence and connections to keep the club stocked with good players so that he could gamble on the outcome of the matches, which for many seasons were regularly in Hambledon's favour. Hambledon was a convenient medium for him to assuage his passion for risk, and when the club came to a natural end, he simply moved house to St Marylebone in order to be near the new ground managed by Thomas Lord.

We can assume his connection with MCC would have been very strong, as he was in the neighbourhood and was a close associate of some of the founding members of the Club. We can assume too that he was an early member, but the great fire of 1825 that burned down the pavilion also burned most of the club's early records and so we have no way of being certain.

Hambledon's success brought Powlett to the club, rather than the other way around. Like a bear to a honeypot, he went there for what he could get out of the club rather than what he could put into it – the same motivation that took him to Lord's. All sports have had men like him from time to time, and all sports would be better off without them. Every time you see an advertisement for a betting organisation at a cricket ground, or on television or on a cricket website, think of Charles Powlett and remind yourself that, without gamblers, professional cricket, and many other sports, would surely die. Corruption or death: it is a baleful thought.

There is, however, a rather more noble connection between the Powlett family and cricket, but it took two generations and half a century to bring some lustre to the Powlett name from half a world away. Nephew Charles still had powerful connections, thanks to the Bolton dukedom, from the Prince Regent to Jane Austen and James Boswell. However, they viewed him as more a figure of fun than one of Christian authority: Austen modelled the character of Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* on him and mocked him mercilessly in her letters to her sister, for he was very good at spending more

money than he had and married a wife who was equally extravagant. They had several children once they were finally able to marry, and their youngest, Frederick – having discovered there was nothing to inherit from his father, who died in 1834 – went to Australia three years later to seek his fortune, settling in what would become the state of Victoria.

Frederick was a real cricket lover and he prospered in Australia. On 15 November 1838 he and four other men – Robert Russell, George B. Smyth and brothers Alfred and Charles Mundy – agreed to form a cricket club to be known as the Melbourne Cricket Club. Frederick was only 27 but had already established a reputation as a fine cricketer. He became an early president of the antipodean MCC, well before he played two first-class matches for Victoria in the 1850s.

Frederick Powlett's first cousin, Frederick Temple, went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury at the end of the nineteenth century. His son, William Temple, who also became Archbishop of Canterbury, was once reported as saying: "Personally, I have always looked upon cricket as organised loafing." But that's rather better than looking at it as a source of betting income.

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NO BRIEF STAY OF EXECUTION

Mark Whitaker on the tragic tale of Leslie Hylton

Just before 8.30 on a crisp May morning in 1955 a tall, middle-aged man – muscular but still lithe – dressed in a pale grey tropical suit and freshly ironed white shirt, walked calmly towards the gallows from his prison cell in Kingston, Jamaica. As his last meal he had been offered a special breakfast of banana porridge with cow's milk, toast and eggs, and cocoa, but he had eaten nothing. Instead, having converted to Roman Catholicism since his imprisonment the previous October, he quietly recited the Rosary. A priest accompanied him on his final walk.

In the street outside St Catherine District Prison a crowd of several hundred had been keeping vigil. At precisely 8.37 the prison gate opened and an official pinned up a notice confirming that the prisoner had been declared dead. There was a collective moan from the waiting crowd and a few shouts of protest. Many walked away in tears. The man whose final moments they had come to share as best they could was Leslie Hylton: the only Test cricketer ever to be executed for murder. For those from the poorer parts of Kingston, Hylton was one of theirs – in his cricket and his crime.

"That fine but ill-fated fast bowler" was how independent Jamaica's socialist leader Michael Manley summed up Hylton in his classic *A History of West Indian Cricket* – a sentence that could stand even if Hylton had not shot his wife to death. Born into poverty in 1905, he never knew his father. His mother died when he was three. An unmarried aunt brought him up, but she died when Hylton was 15. He left school and drifted from job to unskilled job. "Like many of us of humble beginnings," his barrister said at the trial, "he had to make life for himself."

What he made most importantly was a reputation as a talented all-rounder – a swing bowler who could turn to spin and a useful middle-order batsman. He was picked for Jamaica in 1927. The following spring, Hylton was sent to Barbados to take part in a series of trials for West Indies' very first tour of England. He did not make the cut. Instead, the snooty Bridgetown press dismissed him as a "slinger and a garden bowler". Inter-island rivalry in the Caribbean of the 1920s had a nasty edge of colour-consciousness, and Leslie Hylton was very black indeed.

Perhaps he was fortunate not to go to England in the summer of 1928. The series marked the MCC's belated granting of Test status to West Indies, but the tourists were out of their depth in all three matches. Faced with one of England's strongest teams – a batting order that included Hobbs, Sutcliffe, Hammond and Hendren and the bowling attack of Larwood, Tate and the great Kent leg-spinner "Tich" Freeman – West Indies lost each time by an innings.

Historians of early West Indian cricket agree that the side was weaker because it reflected deep Caribbean prejudices – both racial and regional. George Headley was yet to appear, so the assumption that black men could only bowl still held sway. Jamaica – where Marcus Garvey was inspiring a nascent resistance movement to colonial rule – was regarded by the black and brown patricians of Trinidad and Barbados as a culturally primitive and politically dangerous outpost. The selection odds were heavily stacked against a poor working-class cricketer from Kingston.

He was not picked to play against the (relatively weak) England side that toured the Caribbean in 1930, nor for West Indies' inaugural trip to Australia a year later – not even for three Tests in England in the summer of 1933. But on 8 January 1935 – nearing his thirtieth birthday – Hylton finally pulled on a West Indies sweater at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, at the start of what Kingston's *Daily Gleaner* called "the most important Test Match ever to be played in the West Indies". The opposition once again was England, led this time by RES Wyatt, and the *Gleaner*'s cricket correspondent deemed it "the strongest batting strength that ever visited these shores". The Test was a low-scoring rain-ruined oddity with both teams reversing their second-innings batting orders in the hope of better conditions. Hylton found himself opening – he top-scored with 19 – but, more importantly, his first-innings bowling figures were 3 for 8 off 7.3 overs.

For the second Test in Trinidad, Hylton shared the new ball again with the Barbadian EA Martindale – Learie Constantine bowled first change – and the duo reduced England to 23 for 5. Hylton dismissed Wyatt and Wally Hammond. Needing 324 in their second innings to win the match, England were swept aside for 107, Hylton and Constantine taking three wickets each. The third Test at the Bourda in Guyana was drawn (England were barracked for slow scoring and defensive bowling), but Hylton again impressed with first-innings figures of 4 for 27.

The series ended in mid-March at Sabina Park in Kingston. George Headley scored the first Test double-century for West Indies, and England

went down by an innings. Strangely and sadly, the team's other Jamaican – in what proved to be his only Test appearance on his home ground – went wicketless. Michael Manley's judgment is that Hylton with his "fine control of length and swing" proved throughout the series to be an effective foil to the pace and hostility of Martindale and Constantine. By beating England – and the way they played the game – the three fast bowlers, wrote Manley, "brought the first unalloyed joy to the cricket community of the Caribbean".

West Indies were not to play another Test for more than four years. When they did, at Lord's in late June 1939, they found themselves up against a new generation of English batsmen. But the young Len Hutton and Denis Compton faced the same ageing trio of Caribbean pacemen. When Hutton was out four short of a double-century it was Hylton who bowled him. The Jamaican, though, had not been included in the original tour party – he was only in St John's Wood that day because of a remarkable campaign on his behalf.

He had been in Trinidad for the usual pre-tour trials in January – and had done well enough – so the Kingston press was outraged when he was not selected. Four other Jamaicans and six Trinidadians were in the party – the *Gleaner*'s pugnacious chief cricket correspondent, who used the byline Longfield, referred to "Trinidad's West Indian team for England" in his column that appeared on 9 February 1939. "This is how I feel about it," he raged. "Jamaica should immediately disconnect herself from all association with West Indian cricket, even to the extent of refusing to allow our cricketers who have been selected to make the trip." The following day's front page carried two main headlines. The first and largest read: "His Holiness the Pope is Dead"; the second, only slightly smaller, was "British Newspaper Surprised at the Exclusion of Hylton". The *Daily Telegraph*, readers were informed, was reporting how pleased England's batsmen were at the news that they would not have to face Hylton.

Over the following week, letter after letter from readers – expressing a shared anti-Trinidadian outrage – supported Longfield's view. One said: "The selection of JB Stollmeyer in preference to Hylton is scandalous. It has been a complete farce having any trials at all." Another correspondent wrote in support of Longfield's call for the Jamaican contingent to be withdrawn. One difficulty for the paper's cricket correspondent, though, was that Jamaica's much-respected captain – the prominent solicitor Noel Nethersole – was also a West Indian selector and seemingly complicit in the slur on Hylton and the island. On 21 February, Longfield clarified his position in an attempt to protect Nethersole: "Really my attack is directed at the Queen's Park Club, which has the temerity not only of regarding themselves as the Board of Control of the game in Trinidad but of cricket in the West Indies as a whole."

Amidst all this tumult and shouting, Hylton remained silent which the *Gleaner*'s sports columnist G St C Scotter felt was "entirely in keeping with that excellent sportsmanship that he has shown at all times during the past few seasons". Scotter urged the Jamaican Board to formally ask the West Indies selectors to reconsider their position. He also expressed his confidence that, were a public fund to be set up, "Jamaica will pay for him. I am certain the money for this purpose would be subscribed by the cricketing public with enthusiasm." This was to call the selectors' bluff as they had suggested that Hylton's omission had been forced on them by the cost of paying for the three professionals in the party – Headley, Constantine and Martindale.

Within days they announced that Hylton would be sailing for England after all. Readers of the *Gleaner* were treated to some of Longfield's most hyperbolic prose: "Leslie Hylton has at last got his chance to go on an England tour after waiting for over ten years, and after the entire West Indies – with the possible exception of Barbados – have cried out in shame at the injustice done to this cricketer. Starting from 1928, three selection committees had rejected him. If they had gone about the matter in the usual manner of things, they would have saved themselves the most severe criticism probably ever levelled at the heads of a selection committee in the history of international cricket."

Though one suspects he gave himself some of the credit, Longfield concluded that the committee buckled because "the public of the West Indies demanded [Leslie Hylton's] inclusion." It was an exercise in selection-by-the masses that did not go unnoticed in the north of England, where Neville Cardus – assessing the West Indian tourists for the *Manchester Guardian* – had this to say of the Jamaican bowler: "Hylton is of the versatile type, capable of changing from medium fast to slow spin, and in view of the special efforts made to include him in the party West Indian cricketers must hold a high opinion of his abilities."

They did, but at the age of 34 his abilities were on the wane. There were considerations other than purely cricketing ones in his last-minute selection. It was politically prudent and also, possibly, an acknowledgement of slights in the past. Sadly it did not work out on the field. At Lord's, where England – despite centuries in both innings from George Headley – won by eight wickets, Hylton took just two rather expensive wickets. Then in the second Test at Old Trafford, a low-scoring draw, there was just the one. He was dropped for the final game at The Oval.

Two weeks after it finished England declared war on Germany. By then the West Indians had sailed home. One of the first things Hylton did upon his return was to announce his retirement from representative cricket. He got a job with the probation service, married and had a son. His days of celebrity – when his name featured on the front page of the island's newspapers – were over. That is until 7 May 1954.

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At approximately 2am the police station in the St Andrew district of Kingston received an emergency phone call insisting that an officer go round to 31 Arnold Road. The caller would not give a reason, but the tone of his voice suggested that he should not be ignored. When an officer

reached the house there was a man waiting for him on the front lawn. "I am Leslie Hylton," he said. "You must know me. I have shot my wife." He led the policeman into the bedroom and showed him the body into which he had fired seven bullets from a revolver. "It has happened, I am sorry," Hylton reportedly said. "I guess I lost control of myself."

Hylton had married Lurline Rose in October 1942. He courted her for two long years during which he had had to put up with the disdain and hostility of Lurline's parents. Her father was Jamaica's first black inspector of police, and he and his wife made no attempt to hide the fact that despite Hylton's cricketing fame they considered him to be way below the social and educational class they expected in a son-in-law. But the marriage seemed a happy one and in 1947 a son was born. Then, soon after the death of Lurline's father in 1951, the Hyltons moved into the Rose family home in Arnold Road. They needed grandmaternal help with childcare as, within weeks of the move, Lurline made the first of many trips to the United States. She had set her heart on becoming an upmarket dress designer, and New York, she said, was the only place she could get the right training.

Her absences from Kingston grew longer and longer, but Hylton seemed to have accepted them until the postman delivered an unexpected and anonymous letter to 31 Arnold Road in late April 1954. It had been posted in Brooklyn, and claimed that Lurline Hylton had been conducting an adulterous love affair with a man called Roy Francis. "I have been so ashamed and grieved at Lurline's behaviour in this country," the correspondent wrote, "that all I can say is she has let down her own sex, her country, and particularly other married women".

Leslie Hylton immediately sought the opinion and advice of his wife's mother and siblings. They agreed she should return to Kingston as soon as possible even though they knew this would mean Lurline missing the beginning of an important course. Hylton sent her a cold telegram:

"Cancel arrangements re. school. Come home immediately. Do not ask questions."

Lurline's reply suggested she knew all too well what those questions might be:

"Booked seat Flight 771 to arrive Sunday 2nd. Don't worry, all will be well. Love from your wife."

Initially, all did seem to be well. But only for three brief days. Late in the afternoon of 5 May 1954, Lurline asked Melvin Richards – a 15-year-old local who did odd jobs for the Roses – to take a letter to the post box for her. Leslie saw him on his way out and was immediately suspicious. After dinner he walked to the home of the post-mistress, whom he knew well, and asked if she would open the box and let him have a letter that was posted earlier. She told him under no circumstances could she do that: it would mean breaking the law. For the next 24 hours he managed to contain his anger and anxiety, but just after midnight on 6 May his composure broke down. He confronted Lurline, saying he knew the letter was addressed to Roy Francis and that he would be allowed to see it the following morning. Both statements were lies.

We only have Leslie Hylton's testimony from the trial about what transpired between him and his wife in their bedroom that morning. He told the court she screamed:

"I should have followed my parents' advice and not married you. You are not of my class. Roy is a better man than you. I love him. Just the sight of you makes me sick. He has given me joy I have never known with you. I want to bear his children. My body belongs to him."

The transcript of the proceedings mentions that at this point Hylton, and several people in the public gallery, were in tears. The accused cricketer was eventually able to continue his account:

"I felt dizzy. I began seeing things. I pictured my wife in the man's arms, kissing him. I pictured her having intercourse with him. I saw two people. I don't know what happened then. Suddenly I saw blood. Blood all over, and I realised that I had shot my wife."

The chief prosecution counsel, Harvey DaCosta, suggested that Hylton had "concocted this melodramatic bedroom scene". But how he presented his wife's attitude towards him was sensationally corroborated when the text of the letter he had tried to intercept was revealed to the court. Mrs Hylton had written to Roy Francis:

"My Beloved,

It's now I'm realising even more than I did before how much I love you. Can you imagine me trying to stand another man's affection? It gives me a feeling I want to vomit."

She gave him the address of a friend in Kingston to which he could write, and concluded the letter by reassuring him:

"I'm going to force my man's hand as soon as I think I can, and I feel my Mum is behind me."

She certainly was. Mrs Rose was the first prosecution witness and did nothing to hide her sense of social superiority over Hylton. She remembered saying this to her son-in-law after his arrest:

"This is the very reason why I did not agree for Lurline to marry you, because you have no background."

The court was also told that the post-mortem had revealed that Lurline had had an abortion only days before she flew back to Jamaica from New York.

Hylton's arrest in May 1954 and his trial in October were front-page news in Jamaica. Thousands gathered at Arnold Road when the story of Lurline's shooting broke. The *Gleaner* carried exhaustive reports from the courtroom, and the cricketer's case attracted some of Kingston's leading legal minds. His solicitor was none other than Noel Nethersole – the former Jamaica captain and West Indian selector. By 1954 Nethersole, an Oxford-educated economist, had become a significant player in Jamaican politics. There is no way

that Hylton could have afforded Noel Nethersole's fees – the solicitor must have acted pro bono and paid for the services of Vivian Blake, one of Kingston's star black barristers.

It was never an option for his defence to argue that Leslie Hylton had not fired the shots that killed his wife. So Blake's job was to convince the all-male jury that he had done so in a moment of maddened passion – a response to extreme provocation and not with any cold-blooded intent. Were he to be able to do so, the verdict would be manslaughter and not first-degree murder. Blake set out to argue that the way Hylton responded to his wife that fatal night showed he was a typical straightforward Jamaican man – one who had simply made a terrible, irrevocable, but almost understandable mistake. It was, he told the members of the jury in his opening statement, "a case of deep tragedy". He insisted they could only properly judge Hylton's crime if they understood what sort of life he had had.

"The extent to which we as individuals react to the powerful emotions of love, anger or fear, depends on circumstances over which we have relatively little control: and for that reason you are going to hear evidence as to the early years of the accused for the purpose of appreciating the past, because it is only against that background and in that perspective that you can assess this case. The accused is a simple fellow, an ordinary Jamaican, like so many of us of humble beginnings."

But unlike the large majority of ordinary Jamaicans, Blake continued, Hylton had had a particularly deprived childhood, with neither father nor mother after the age of three.

"He had to make life for himself, and he achieved a certain amount of success on the field of sport. But, you will have to ask yourselves what substitute success in sport can be for the deprivation of love, maternal love."

And this deprivation, Blake argued, eventually led to an irrational idealisation of Lurline whom he fell in love with at the age of 36 – especially as he had had to put up with her parents' dismissal of him.

The infidelity Lurline so crudely flaunted was, he argued, simply too much for Hylton to bear. As a final rhetorical twist, Blake added a touch of politics to his argument that the cricketer should not be found guilty of murder. The island was desperate for independence from Britain, and Hylton's action – he suggested to the jury – was truly Jamaican. No Englishman, he said, would have had the guts to shoot his unfaithful wife.

But members of the jury were not convinced. The prosecution's counsel, Harvey DaCosta, could point to the fact that Leslie Hylton had recently bought a new stock of ammunition for his revolver and, crucially, seven shots had been fired which meant the gun would have had to be broken and reloaded. Initially the jury could not reach a unanimous verdict but, after the judge asked them to reconsider, their decision was that Leslie Hylton had committed pre-meditated murder. They tempered it with a plea for mercy, but the judge ignored it. Nethersole organised an appeal in January 1955, but the court upheld the original verdict and sentence. Then the Privy Council in London rejected Hylton's leave to appeal to them. Finally, a petition signed by many of Jamaica's great and good was sent to the governor urging him to commute the death sentence to one of life imprisonment. But to no avail.

Leslie Hylton – in his treatment by cricket's hierarchy, and the unforgiving punishment for a crime of passion – was seen by many as a symbol of how hard, and perhaps how unfair, life could be for those born into the poverty of Jamaica's working class. Under different circumstances he might have been accorded a funeral befitting a popular hero. Instead, his coffin was carried by a small group of fellow prisoners and he was buried in the shadow of the scaffold in the compound of St Catherine District Prison.

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CRICKET AS ESCAPE

Sam Collins on love and loss

I am writing this in the North Terminal of Gatwick airport, tucked in a corner of high ground safely above a tidal wave of fake tan. My wife is wandering around somewhere, wondering why she married a cricket journalist, and our plane has been delayed for a couple of hours. In a microclimate of instant meals and quicker turnovers, it feels like a long time. But, of course, it's not. Some people say a five-day Test match is a long time, but it's nothing compared to four years. Most people would consider 140 years a very long time, but in the scheme of things it is infinitesimal. Two hours is not a long time. Two hours is what I have to write this piece.

My phone won't stop buzzing. I find it difficult to concentrate at the best of times, but it's almost impossible at the moment. We're releasing a film about something that a lot of people care about, and if nothing prepares you for releasing a film about something a lot of people care about, certainly nothing prepares you for trying to distribute it yourself. I've lost 20 minutes already. Suddenly, this time is precious.

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Test cricket is all about time: the time it takes to play it, the time it has been "alive". That it has been alive for 140 years is because it has something special, something that nothing else has replicated in all those years, something that allows it to mean something to people all over the world.

Four years ago, my friend Jarrod and I decided to try and make a film about Test cricket. I'm not sure why it started – maybe we wanted to mean something. We'd been making piss-take videos about Test matches for a few years and, while they were fun, there's only so long you can make piss-take videos about Test matches. Looking around the press box, unless you were Atherton or Holding – which we clearly weren't – there wasn't much to want to be. Hit up or get out. So we started making the film.

The subject was obvious. Everyone around us kept saying Test cricket was dying. Some said it because they thought they meant it; others said it because they thought other people meant it; others said it because the others were saying it. But none of this talk of "dying" really seemed to be anything other than a convenient way to pass the time. So we thought if anybody could plunge to the bottom of this well of nothingness and bring up some truth for people to drink, it was probably us with our lion-costume mascot and our £196 video camera. Besides, we had nothing else to do.

When we started the film I was 28. I'd been with Sophie for a year. Apart from her, I had no real commitments and nothing to lose. It was the sort of decision you make when you are 28. Four years? Ha! We thought it would take six months.

It turned out that being young, naive and probably a bit of an idiot was the best weapon I had. People end up saying things to you that they probably wouldn't if they considered you to be a "proper" journalist. But the more incompetent we were, the more time dragged on. Then we got lucky. As the years went by, we gradually worked out how to pan out from the car we were following, and it turned out that car was driving towards a cliff in slow motion. We just had to be stubborn enough to hang around and watch it fly off.

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Last week was the film's London premiere. The previous day we buried my mother. Technically she was cremated, but it doesn't sound right to say: "We cremated my mother." She was 74 – old, but not that old. The day before that was my unborn baby's five-month scan. It was a long week.

Jarrod wrote a few years ago about having his son: "until now I'd been a son, now I was a father." It was simple but brilliant, because it just summed up how things sort of happen but you can only grasp the enormity of what they mean when they are over, and even then you can't really put it into words. Losing a parent is like that. It happens to everyone, but everyone's experience is different, and I'm still not sure you can actually say anything more profound to describe it than: "Yesterday I had a mum and today I don't."

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We hung on, got the film made – for one reason: people love cricket. People we'd never met before, from different religions and different continents, rich and poor, gave us a lot of their money to make a film about something they loved. We had to finish it.

And in the end, our film wasn't just about Test cricket; it was about the whole game. More specifically, it was all about the battle for the money those fans were pumping into that game. Jarrod and I were just the naive Johnny Appleseeds (copyright Harsha Bhogle) who stumbled upon a story about businessmen-cum-administrators taking this precious thing; this game – which was so important to so many people, and as a result now so unimaginably valuable commercially – and apparently deliberately, wilfully, shrinking it as a means of retaining control. And when a sport is shrinking, it is dying. Meanwhile, most of the journalists looked the other way, and the fans unwittingly sat on their

sofas, drank Pepsi and renewed their satellite-TV subscriptions to fund the whole sorry process. A modern, human story, set in cricket.

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Ten years ago, just after the 2005 Ashes, my mother got breast cancer. I can't remember how I felt, so my 22-year-old self must have just assumed she would beat it. This was a woman who had fought for air as the younger twin in the womb. Whose own father died early. Who was thrown through a car windscreen into a brick wall when some drunk prick crashed a car on the way to her first dance – yes, they still "danced" in the 1950s. She had plates in her face, scars on her stomach, but fight in her heart. She waited 20 years to marry the man she loved, miscarried at 41, and still kept on going to have the children they wanted. By 2007 – no hair, one breast – she had beaten the cancer. She was tough.

But by the time I'd started the film it was clear things weren't right. First there was a black-out. Then an occasional loss of balance. Then tiredness. Then shortness of breath and temper.

Was it the cancer drugs? Ask the doctor. The doctor doesn't know. Was the cancer back? For two years the doctor doesn't know. Why has my arm stopped working? Everybody has an opinion, a solution. None of them work.

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Now here's some truth. Cricket is dying and I can tell you what it looks like. The market is winning. It will be Twenty20 and it will be India. The rest will cease to matter. Protest all you like but if you play market rules the market will win. For 140 years cricket has fought everything we've thrown at it. But it can't beat the market by itself. Cricket needs our help.

Cricket is a game, and games have rules. Rules have rulers. And in cricket's case the job of its rulers is to protect this ancient, wonderful sport in all its forms from being destroyed by the market. And if those rulers aren't capable of doing their job, then we need to find some people who are. That is what proper governance exists for: to protect things that are important from what we ordinary, base, flawed human beings can do to them.

Our film has shown that we cannot trust the men who run this game. Now we have to fight them, and we have to replace them.

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As the film progressed, so my mother deteriorated. Slowly, relentlessly.

It turned out to be some sort of twisted lovechild of Parkinson's disease and ALS. I'm still not sure exactly what it was called because we were told so many things that eventually the name became irrelevant. When someone is about to shoot you in the face it doesn't really matter what gun they are using.

Watching someone you love wither before your eyes in ultra-slow-motion is not something I can recommend. We became a household of meaningful silences. What could you say to a woman whose mind and memory remained perfectly intact as her body gave up; who knew exactly what was happening to her?

I wish I could say she took it with smiles and laughter, but this wasn't a film. She was sad, then she was depressed and then she was angry and finally she was afraid. This disease was a fucking bastard. It took away her independence, her ability to look after her family, her chance to watch a son get married, and finally her dignity.

By the end, in a house full of her own things, she had one meaningful possession: a battered old watch that she clutched permanently in her good hand. She was, quite literally, clinging onto time. When her lungs began to shut down, there was no fighting it any more.

We had tried *everything*. And there was *nothing* we could do. And – although I loved her more than any man can love a game – that's why it was better when it was over.

When I am at home now, every time I catch sight of one of the old bats, balls, pads or gloves she bought us, I see my mother. I was about to say I see my childhood, but on second thoughts I think I see her parenthood. I suppose I'll find out what that means in a few months' time.

All I know for sure is that the day my mother finally died, I watched Test cricket. I wondered why Gary Ballance stayed so deep in his crease, how bad Mitchell Starc's ankle was, whether Ian Botham really had been hacked. At tea I cried for 19 minutes, and smeared the tears on my face like a sunscreen that will never wash away. And then I laughed at Mitchell Johnson.

Four hours later, I watched it all again with my father and my brother.

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In five days' time I'll be on a plane home again, back to the start of the real battles. Some things in life we can't win. I suppose the things that keep us going are the ones we can.

Cricket doesn't have to die. A billion people is a pretty big army. We may not all have weapons, but we have eyes, ears, tongues and fingers, and now our game needs us to use them. Please, help us #changecricket.

Visit www.deathofagentlemanfilm.com to find your nearest showing of the film. For more information on the #changecricket campaign, and to sign the filmmakers' petition, visit www.changecricket.com.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Crispin Andrews started playing cricket aged four, trying to copy Ian Chappell and Jeff Thomson in the back garden. He goes to Germany at least twice a year, to see the Scorpions or visit the Christmas markets. He doesn't watch reality TV. Read more at http://crispin-andrews-cricket-writer.yolasite.com/

Simon Barnes has written more than 20 books including three novels, which comprise a Comedy, a Voyage and Return and a Rebirth. His sporting memoir *Losing It* will be published next year.

Tim Beard is a teacher and cricket coach. His writing career includes plays and articles, as well as thousands of vocabulary tests. He has made all the scores in the 90s, and is still trying to bring his lifetime batting average closer to his bowling average. His favourite cricketer is John Rice of Hampshire. If you'd like to read more of his poems, they are at www.drtimbeard.com

Benjamin Brill is a writer and musician based in London. As a cricketer (RHB, SLA), he flatters to deceive. However, since deception is considered an important weapon in the spin bowler's armoury, he has reassured himself that this might not be such a bad thing. He blogs at accidentallywritingaboutfood.tumblr.com and tweets @benjaminbrill

Hugh Chevallier has lived in north Hampshire for most of his adult life. He laments the lack of village cricket, but finds some solace in his role as co-editor of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*.

Sam Collins is a freelance journalist, broadcaster and filmmaker. He has worked for the *Guardian*, ESPNcricinfo and *The Cricketer*. *Death of a Gentleman* – an independent feature documentary film on the future of cricket – is his first film and was released this summer. He is the proud owner of a golden duck at Lord's, and finds writing short biographies surprisingly hard.

The author of 14 books, **Charlie Connelly** used to walk past WG Grace's house every day on his way to and from school. His route also took him past the residences of Kate Bush and the medium Doris Stokes, neither of whom were any help whatsoever to his fledgling cricket career.

James Coyne is a member of that strange bunch who spend much of their time bemoaning cricket's absence from the Olympics and Paralympics. In a further indication of early middle age, he has also played for the Forty Club, 13 years earlier than necessary. On a day-to-day basis he is the assistant editor of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, and co-edits the Cricket Round the World section.

John Crace held the key No.10 batting slot for the Hemingford Hermits – one of the more useless cricket teams in Britain – for nearly 30 years. In that time, he reached double figures on only three occasions. His retirement was mourned by nobody but himself. He is also the *Guardian*'s parliamentary sketch-writer and author of the *Digested Reads*. @johnjcrace

Although well-educated, **Paul Edwards** would be sent down from the university of life. He reads, writes and watches cricket. He cannot drive, swim or even ride a bicycle. The simplest practical tasks defeat him. He is plainly a good man to write about Francis Thompson.

Gideon Haigh has been a journalist for 31 years, written 31 books and edited seven others. Not that he's a man for figures.

Mike Jakeman is an economist by day and a sports writer by night. He plays Sunday cricket and lives in London. His first book, *Saving the Test*, was published in 2013.

Robert Kitson has been the *Guardian*'s rugby union correspondent since 1999 but has also covered a range of other sports, cricket included, since his earliest Fleet Street days with Hayters Sports Agency in the mid-1980s. Over that same period he has kept wicket for (among others) Edinburgh University, Hampshire Hogs CC, Sherborne Pilgrims, Buccaneers CC and, most recently, the Devon-based Old Fallopians. He is still awaiting a benefit season.

Will Macpherson is a freelance cricket and rugby journalist who works for the *Guardian*, ESPNcricinfo, *All Out Cricket* magazine and others. He's in his mid-20s, lives in south London, is constantly eyeing his next trip to the Antipodes and believes Arundel was a rather fine place for a cricket lover to grow up.

Alex Massie is Scotland Editor of the *Spectator*, a columnist for *The Times* and a contributor to many other publications. More pertinently, he helps make up the numbers for Selkirk CC in Division Three of the East of Scotland League. He thinks he should bowl more often; his captain takes a different view.

Cricket writer for *The Australian* from 1998–2007, **Andrew Ramsey** has also written for *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*. Author of *The Wrong Line*, a recount of life as a touring cricket journalist, he is now a senior writer for cricket.com.au. The opinions he expresses here are personal and observational.

Although he realises that his chances of being the answer to England's spin-bowling problems are now long gone, **Jonathan Rice** still plays, watches and writes about cricket at every opportunity. He is the Vice-Captain For Life of Heartaches CC, and has

written over 50 books on cricket and many other subjects, including *The Pavilion Book of Pavilions*, *The Wisden Collector's Guide* (with Andrew Renshaw) and, most recently, *Wisden On Grace* (available at all good bookshops and online providers). He is also chairman of the Kent Cricket Heritage Trust.

Alan Tyers writes about sport for the *Daily Telegraph*. He is the author of six books published by Bloomsbury and illustrated by Beach; they include *WG Grace Ate My Pedalo* and *Crickileaks: The Secret Ashes Diaries*. He has interests in film, comedy, and the work of Essex and England all-rounder Ravi Bopara.

Mark Whitaker recently hung up his microphone after 20 years of making documentaries for Radio 4. About half a dozen were on the history of cricket. He's now trying to write about both the cricket-obsessed Maharajah of Patiala and the philosopher Thomas Hobbes. His book *Running for their Lives*, about professional ultra distance runners Arthur Newton and Peter Gavuzzi, came out in 2012.

THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

ISSUE 12

The twelfth issue of *The Nightwatchman* will be out in early December.

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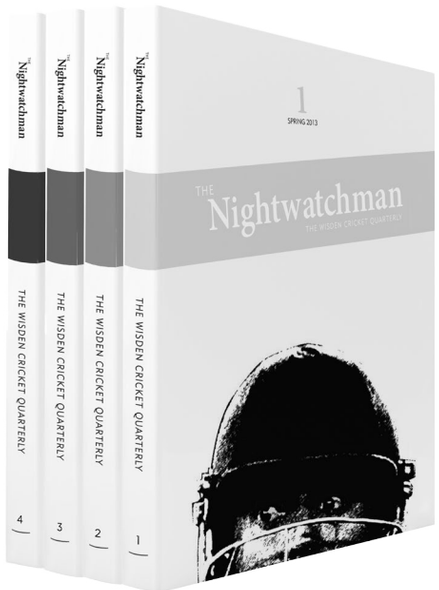

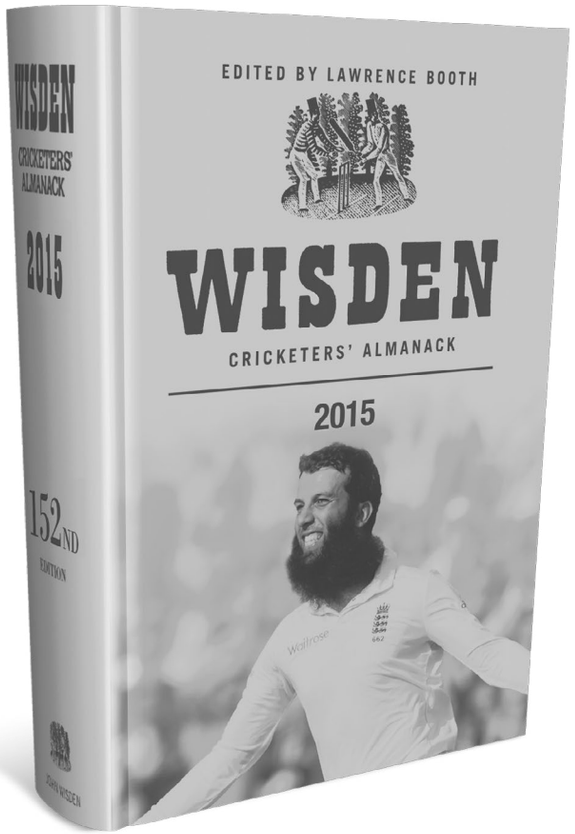

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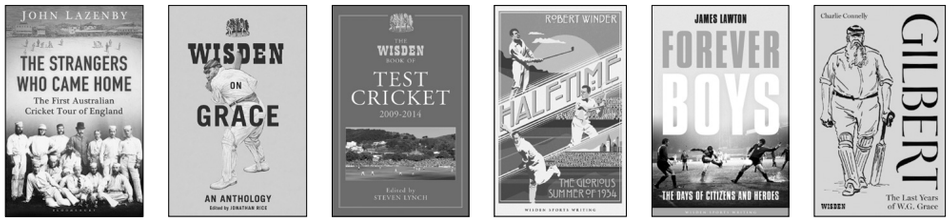

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