

A Very happy Saturday to one and all. (Everyone, I have discovered how to do single-letter Capitals)

Well despite millions of hours of negotiations with lots of companies with the initials VW we are still too far apart with any of them to conclude a massive sponsorship deal that would give all readers at least two tickets to every single first-class cricket match played between now and May 20th in the United Kingdom - some companies are just so unwilling to negotiate, but we have a plan B and it is so good, so cunning, so devious that it hasn't been thought of yet, but watch this space as they used to say in the old days of queuing to get into the cinema!

It seems that cricket is trying its best to get re-started but quite rightly the safety of players, staff, officials - everyone involved has to be the priority. In a previous VW I mentioned that if cricket (and football) were able to offer free-to-air viewing then maybe there could be a way of playing again. Well, it seems that this could be happening. Both cricket and football are in talks to come back, with the support of government, but in the hope that more of the country can watch.

There is criticism from a lot of areas that we shouldn't be thinking about sport when so many people are suffering and so many lives have been lost and I understand that argument completely. But there is a very strong counter argument that in the current situation people need something to alleviate the stress and the anxiety that lockdown or even partial lockdown has brought on. The argument against presumes that the sporting authorities have little regard for the enormous strain the country is under - on the contrary I feel the actions of the professional sporting community has reflected the generosity and kindness of people at large.

Cricketers from every county have been helping with deliveries within their own areas - giving free online coaching, making generous donations of time and money, these elite athletes whom we, I, have derided for being over-paid, have been doing what they can in the face of the Pandemic. In the same way that professional footballers have been supporting local causes not just with donations but with actual help sports people from across the country have been contributing.

One of my friends has suggested that we do a Mr and Mrs Quiz...for those of you old enough to remember it is basically a quiz in which a man is shown to know absolutely nothing about his wife...well I am bound to win, because I never forget an anniversary or birthday and I always listen...I will be offering online tutorials at £824.39 per hour for men who need to become as good as me...(I must remember to take Lorraine off the list to get this)

A few different things in this edition of VW. I hope the little challenge (bottom right) is fun and also the next task of picking a **team** is at the bottom of the article by John Arlott. Thank you to Richard Reardon for suggesting it. All please have a look at the box bottom left, it might be of interest.

Bill (Amazing husband, Lorraine (Who won't be seeing this VW owing to technical difficulties), Abs (who is now contemplating a career as a thespian) and Libs (who won't see this as she will grass me up to Lorraine).

Important.

As you can imagine I have had a lot of conversations over the past few months, a far greater number than I would normally have. A lot of collectors have been asking about how buying and selling **Wisdens** will be impacted upon by the current situation and a lot of collectors are worried. Also, I have had a lot of questions ranging from values to how my business (Wisdenworld) is doing. So I thought I would open this out to everyone who receives this newsletter.

Please send me any questions you would like an answer to (Wisdens, prices, what to buy, not to buy, my business, buying, selling, etc etc...I am afraid Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Dadaism are not my strengths) - but seriously, your questions can be simple, detailed, nosey, whatever you want.

I was asked by one person - 'Are you currently selling a lot?' And that will be the first question I answer. I promise I will answer all questions and I will answer honestly.

So if there is a question you have, please email or telephone:

A Very Odd Question.....

A Enough of this talk about cricket. **Up for grabs in this issue's poser is a DVD** entitled 'Death of a Gentleman - The Biggest Scandal in Sport'. Described as one of the finest documentaries on cricket. To win a copy the only thing you have to do is to tell me who is the 'entertainer' (or 'entertainers' if a double-act) that makes you laugh out loud. Past or present who gives you a real old fashioned belly-laugh. I know, I know, a bit non-crickety, a bit off the beaten track, a bit of blue-sky thinking, out-of-the-box stuff, but hey, I look forward to your responses. One person who enters will be drawn out of the 'hat' by Abbey as Libby's pay demands are extortionate

It Happened in May

1867:

In the first inter-county match of the season, played at the end of May, J.Rickets made his debut in first-class cricket for Lancashire v Surrey at The Oval. Going in first, he carried his bat through the innings for 195 not out.

1867:

H Trumble (Victoria and Australia) was born on May 12th.

1917:

The annual report presented to the Annual Meeting of the M.C.C., on May 2nd referred to Lord's being used as a training centre for Royal Artillery Cadets.

The Long Room in the Pavillion was being used for making hay-nets for Army horses; owing to a reduction in staff, only about 12,000 had been made in 1916 as against 18,000 in 1915.

1957:

G.S. Sobers scored the first double-century of his career, 219 not out for West Indies against Nottinghamshire in their last match before the first Test Match.

1957:

E.R. (Ted) Dexter scored 185 in four hours for Cambridge University against Lancashire, the highest score of his career in England and only exceeded once abroad.

1862:

H.M. Plowden, playing for Cambridge University against M.C.C., at Cambridge, achieved the first hat-trick for the Light Blues.

It was, in fact, one of the earliest in first-class cricket, as it had only been preceded by W.J. Hammersby (for M.C.C., in 1848), G.H.B. Gilbert (for Victoria) in 1857-58 and H.H. Stephenson (for England in 1858).

1912:

No fewer than twenty players, everyone but the two wicket-keepers, went on to bowl during the Hampshire v Kent match at Southampton. Kent opened the match with a score of 599 and Hampshire replied with 418, there being only a draw possible at that point.

1937:

A.H. Dyson (104), playing for Glamorgan against Kent at Swansea on May 1st, set up a record for the quickest century of a season by reaching three-figures before lunch on the opening day of the season (May 1st). Batting for only 110 minutes, he hit two sixes and 16 fours, sharing a tempo that ended in 494 runs for fourteen wickets by the close of play.

1952:

P.R. Umrigar (229 not out) and V.S. Hazare (161 not out) shared an unbroken fourth wicket stand of 366 in 225 minutes for the Indian touring team against Oxford University at Oxford.

Umrigar hit 3 sixes and 33 fours in a total stay of 255 minutes and Hazare hit 29 fours. This partnership set up

a new record for Indian touring teams in England.

1870:

Fuller Pilch died on May 1st, aged sixty-seven. Possibly the greatest batsman in the early days of cricket, Pitch was born in Norfolk where he played his early cricket, and subsequently migrated to Kent.

1870

At the annual meeting of M.C.C., an amendment to the laws was made whereby a bowler could change ends twice instead of once in the same innings, providing he did not bowl more than two overs in succession.

1751:

The New York Gazette carries the first public report of a cricket match played in America.

1868:

Australian Aboriginal Cricket tour of England begins with a match against Surrey Gentlemen.

1878:

Australian Cricket (41 & 12-1) defeat M.C.C., (33 and 19).

1890:

The first-ever official cricket County Championship match begins. Yorkshire defeated Gloucestershire by eight wickets at Bristol. George Ulyett scores the first century in the competition.

1895:

W.G. Grace scores his 1,000th run of the season after 22 days.

1896:

Yorkshire score 887 against Warwickshire.

1920:

After the two-day experiment in 1919, the County Championship reverted to three-day matches. In contrast to the poor weather of recent years, May was a remarkably fine month since it was not until the 28th that a Championship match was drawn, that between Lancashire and Middlesex at Old Trafford.

1920:

The first four Middlesex batsmen in the game against Sussex at Lord's all scored centuries in the county's only innings, the first time this had occurred in first-class cricket.

1945:

Following the conclusion of the war in Europe, hasty arrangements were made to play five three-day matches between sides representing England (Captained by W.R. Hammond) and Australia (Captained by A.L. Hassett). The first match was played at Lord's over Whitsun and resulted in a win for Australia by six wickets. On the Bank Holiday Monday there was an attendance of 30,000 and 67,000 paid over the three days.

The Bowlers Holding the Batsmans Willey

Umpire Shakoor Rana, who was involved in the infamous on-field row with England captain Mike Gatting at Faisalabad in December 1987, has been dropped from Pakistan's Test panel after refusing to undergo a refresher course on umpiring. "I am one of Pakistan's most experienced and respected umpires", he said, "I've stood in over 30 international games. Cricket has been my life. Now I am an outcast. I am sure even Mr. Gatting would not wish me to finish up like this." Pakistan captain Imran Khan said "At the time of the row with Mike Gatting I thought Shakoor was in the right in his interpretation of what had happened when he called dead ball. What he did wrong was to seek so much media attention after the incident."

WCM 1996.

Tempers were freed during the Derbyshire v Yorkshire Benson & Hedges Cup match at derby. Before the match, when a loudspeaker announcement asked for the players to cease practising. Geoff Boycott allegedly swore and made an offensive gesture. The home club requested an apology, which was not forthcoming. Then when Yorkshire batted, captain Chris Old was bowled while six fielders were outside the 30-yard limit. A protest ensued, and after Old and his partner, Boycott, had left the field, Derbyshire captain Geoff Miller followed and telephoned Lord's for a ruling. Old was reinstated by umpire Arthur Jepson and the match continued after a 35-minute delay.

Yorkshire had the satisfaction of winning when David Bairstowe hit a whirlwind 103 not out, including 9 sixes. He and Mark Johnson (4, not out) made an unbeaten 80 for the tenth wicket (a new B & H record) as Yorkshire won with eight balls to spare. The peak of Bairstowe's assault was an over by David Steele from which he took 26 runs: 6,4,2,2,6,6.

The Cricketer, 1981.

A man wrote to me to say that he was in trouble. He said his Afghan hound had chewed up the inside of his *Wisden*, and eaten all the records! What should he do? I didn't really see what I was expected to do about it but remember making one or two rather wet suggestions such as that he should build higher shelves or get a smaller dog. But the obvious answer I should have given was that the Afghan hound should have his *Wisden* teeth taken out."

Brian Johnston

My one attempt at cricket was a disaster and I was sent off the field for not paying attention. As far as I was concerned, cricket was and certainly still is the most tedious and unengaging sporting activity a man could possibly indulge in

(Christian Jennings' autobiography Mouthful of Rocks)

"My father always hated the idea of me becoming a cricketer, he thought I was wasting my time."

Imran Khan

Owing to the adverse weather conditions during the opening weeks of the Australian tour to England in 1968 and the resulting financial problems the loss of cricket caused the tourists, the Australian manager asked all the counties they were due to play from the beginning of June to play on Sundays. Only Kent were able to do so and for the first time in England the Australians played on a Sunday on August 18 at Canterbury.

The Cricketer, 1968.

First-class cricket has increased enormously since the promotion of various counties in 1894 and I am not alone in thinking that nowadays we have too many matches. In my opinion, bowling and fielding would be better if the leading players were not so constantly kept at full tension for six days a week. Not many years ago the leading bowlers were able to vary their serious cricket with a holiday match now and then and the relief did them good. Now they are hard at it from the first week in May till the first week in September, and in fine summers are very apt to get stale.

Notes by the Editor, Sydney Pardon 1904

I used to enjoy cricket, except for one game during the holidays when we were playing up against a telegraph pole. I was the stumper and when I turned suddenly to stop a ball I hit the pole and broke one of my front teeth clean in two. It was with me for ages because there wasn't any question of going to the dentist. You had to pay for the dentist and we didn't have any money"

Joe Gormley, sometime President of the TUC.

Wisden, wagging a rather schoolmasterly forefinger at Hobbs, crisply rebukes him for over-adventurousness at the start of the 1919 season. *Wisden* has at all times been prodigal in his praise; and yet one feels inclined on this occasion to adjure the old yellow-backed troglodyte to have a heart. The most aggressive batsman in the fifteen counties, itching from head to toe with the ugly deprivations of the last four years (1914-18), could surely have been indulged a little.

Jack Hobbs, 2594 runs at 60.32, 7 hundreds and 1 double hundred.

Jack Hobbs, by Ronald Mason (1961)

Arguments are put forward un favour of transforming the great game into a thing of immense rapidity - a sort of Bolshevik cricket devoted to hurricane yorkers and 'swipes'. This, of course, would make quite impossible the science, the law and beauty which are the charm of cricket.

Manchester Guardian editorial, 1918. The end of the First World War had brought calls to liven up the game.

"That was a tremendous six. The ball was still in the air as it went over the boundary."

Fred Trueman

Harry Porter

SCG
Donald Bradman and Sachan Tendulkar facing Dennis Lillee and Hedley Verity

Bob Sumner

Old Trafford (if its not raining)
Clive Lloyd and Gary Sobers facing Michael Holding and Fred Trueman

Richard Reardon

Adelaide Oval
Woodfull and Bradman facing Larwood and Voce

Alan Williams

Lord's
Hobbs and Bradman facing Fred Trueman and Joel Garner

Frank Horton

Canterbury
Hobbs and Hammond -facing Malcolm Marshall and Muralitheran

Michael Baws

Hove
Rajhi and CB Fry facing Lindwall and Miller

Richard Endacott

Lord's
Jack Hobbs and Viv Richards facing Sydney Barnes and Shane Warne

James Bruce

Lord's
Bradman and Steve Smith facing Lindwall and Lillee

Brian Wilsted

Bramhall Lane
Hobbs and WG Grace facing Lohmann and Verity

Janet Tipping

Taunton
Barry Richards and Sachan Tendulkar facing Joel Garner and Imran Khan

Lee Rice

Headingley
Viv Richards and Clive Lloyd facing Andy Roberts and Michael Holding (lets see how R and L like it)

Nick Adamson

The Oval
Bradman and Hutton facing Trueman and Larwood

Carl Shone

The WACA
Bradman and Trumper facing Lindwall and Warne

Mike Nicholson

MCG
WG Grace and CB Fry facing Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne

Liz Hilton

Lord's

Len Hutton and Don Bradman facing Larwood and Courtney Walsh

Jason Ballantyne

Headingley
Geoff Boycott and Chris Tavare facing Phil Edmunds and Derek Pringle (during the Pandemic I could stare at the TV all day watching 2 runs an over, anything to relieve the boredom, even more boredom)

Richard Ball

Headingley
Hobbs and Sutcliffe facing Roberts and Holding

Chris Price

Christchurch
Dexter and Gower facing Derek Pringle and Phil Edmunds (Total flair against abstract mediocrity)

Edward George

The Oval
WG Grace and CP Mead facing Lohmann and Tich Freeman

Sandra Hilton

Cape Town
Kevin Pieterse and AB De Villiers facing Steyn and Donald.

AG Newman

Arundel
Viv Richards and Clive Lloyd facing Harold Larwood and Shane Warne

Wayne Harper

Old Trafford
Flintoff and Stokes facing Brett Lee and Nathan Lyon

Roland Chesterton

Headingley
Ramprakash and Hick facing Courtenay Walsh and Curtley Ambrose (as a West Indian - that'd be like the good old days)

Keith Russell

Newlands cape Town
Victor Trumper and Ranjitsinghi facing Harold Larwood and Colin Blythe.

John Freeman

Colombo
Bradman and Sagakkara facing Larwood and Warne

Tom Peacock

Lord's
Hobbs and Hutton facing Lindwall and Holding

Tanya Bright

Hove
Bradman and Hobbs facing Glem McGrath and Shane Warne

The Importance of Britcher

The major source for our knowledge of the matches played by MCC, and for other major fixtures, is Samuel Britcher (1743 - 1803). In 1791 he published a list of the principal matches of the preceding year and a second publication in 1792 covered 26 matches in the year 1791. He was the pioneer of those who took cricket scoring on from the recording of notches to the setting down of a written record which could stand examination especially at a time when huge wagers depended on a result, and when the press was taking an interest in the game.

Britcher, who was clerk of the parish of Linton in Kent – a centre of the game – had a daughter who married a Marylebone man. He was especially well-known to Linton's Sir Horace Mann – another of the great patrons – and his family links, after the marriage in 1783, would have brought him up to London. As Winchelsea saw in Lord the man to run the ground for MCC so Mann saw in Britcher someone to keep its records. So Britcher found himself scoring for MCC and, in due course, launching his annual publication of scores, which continued until 1806.

Britcher's publication for the 1791 season included a few other matches not involving MCC members such as, for example, East Malling v Barming at East Malling and Waltham v Hornchurch at Waltham Abbey where presumably he or a friend was present to obtain the scores. Closely following him is the record printed by William Epps (c 1765-1833), a printer in Kent, which was published in 1799. Epps' work ends in 1790 because, as he said in his preface, the 'regular annual publication by Mr. Britcher obviates the necessity of continuing this publication.' Some 20 years after both of them, Henry Bentley (1782-1857) published his record of the matches between 1786 and 1822, 22 of which related to 1791 and all included in Britcher's book. Bentley copied his from the MCC score-books at Lord's, which were subsequently destroyed in a fire in 1825. Bentley was a player for some 30 years and then a professional umpire for MCC.

He was also a talented flautist. From 1862 onwards came celebrated *Scores and Biographies* in which the lifelong researches of Arthur Haygarth (1826-1903) appeared under the imprint of Frederick Lillywhite in 15 volumes covering the years 1746 to 1878. While drawing on the sources already mentioned, Haygarth also cited well over 100 books, newspapers and periodicals which he consulted in an exercise he had first begun when a schoolboy at Harrow. As a cricketer he played for MCC and for the Gentlemen v Players on 16 occasions.

Hambleton itself has its own coterie of chroniclers and historians. To the works of John Nyren, John Mitford and James Pycroft must be added the research of the antiquarian and scholar F.S. Ashley-Cooper (1877-1932) whom Irving Rosenwater has called the 'Herodotus of Cricket.' Ashley-Cooper's *Hambleton Chronicle* is the

printed source for the surviving minutes and accounts of the club. Among the 19th century books which touched on events in the late 18th century is John Sutton's account of Nottingham matches.

Periodicals such as *Sporting Magazine* and (marginally) the *Gentleman's Magazine* will reward the patient searcher as well contemporary local newspapers in local library archives or in the British Museum newspaper section at Colindale, Hendon. Many of these furrows were ploughed in the 1920s and 1930s by the surgeon George Buckley (1885-1962); he found time to publish two volumes based on his researches into some 60 newspapers in pre-Victorian times.

On the evidence of sources such as these we are left in no doubt that cricket was a well established sport in 1791. According to the *Hampshire Chronicle* of 8th August 'cricket and archery (were) the prevailing amusements relieved by occasional visits to the Fleet at Spithead'. It competed, however, with 'driving' at Brighton, with 'wiving' at Harrogate and with dancing at Margate, wrote the *London Recorder* on 25 September 1791.

The weekend habit was still half a century away, and games were played irrespective of the day of the week. Depending on your circumstances you might or might not have viewed the 18th century as a 'leisured age'. Those who toiled did so irrespective of whether that day were a Monday or Saturday; many a self-employed craftsman was his own master as to when he took a day off and generously awarded one to his apprentices.

The nobility and gentry were entirely arbiters of their own timetable except for the demands of court, army and the bench. The professional cricketers, often their employees, would be bailiffs, huntsman or servants when not required to play cricket though a new type of professional was emerging in the growing urbanisation of London. He would stay in some lodging house in Oxford Street and seek summer employment as a cricketer. He would also be at the mercy of some of the bookies' runners who would approach him and strike some deal.

There need be no surprise, therefore, that many matches began on a Monday and lasted two days following. Cricket on Sunday, though not frequently, did take place. The 18th century, with its latitudinarian approach to religion, stood apart from 17th-century puritan injunctions and 19th-century Sabbatarian disapproval.

For those of you who wish to source or even purchase the original Britcher scorebooks, very few are in existence and the last one spotted was at an auction in Australia in 2017. This single rebound original sold for a hammer price of £33,250.

THESE I HAVE LOVED



In 1985 legendary broadcaster and writer John Arlott was asked for his all-time England and Australia 'most entertaining elevens'. The article below first appeared in Wisden Cricket Monthly in 1985.

P OINTING an accusing editorial finger, he said 'England and Australia — pick two elevens of the most entertaining cricketers you ever saw — and say why!' Then he strode away in his invariable Napoleonic manner and was struck for 24 off a single over. No stipulation as to who is to be entertained; so that pleasure is usurped by the writer — who probably ought to apologise for his age; but is damned if he will; bad enough being that age anyway; or lucky to have had the delight of watching these great men.

England	Australia
J. B. Hobbs	A. L. Hassett
C. Milburn	C. G. Mccartney
W. R. Hammond	D. G. Bradman
D. C. S. Compton	S. J. McCabe
E. R. Dexter	K. R. Miller
I. T. Botham	K. D. Mackay
W. Rhodes	R. Benaud
M. W. Tate	R. W. Marsh
T. G. Evans	R. R. Lindwall
J. C. Laker	J. E. Walsh
F. H. Tyson	A. A. Mailey

Well, why? Because, above all, they entertained — in their ways so different as almost to cover the entire scope of cricket — good cricket, that is. The match, presumably, will be played in England, otherwise this stream of seam bowlers will barely earn their salt — though did not Maurice Tate, in the losing England side of 1924-25, break Arthur Mailey's record for the number of wickets taken in a Test series? (That, of course, was done when they played a logical Test rubber of five Tests; as opposed to six with 815 not-for-remembering one-day internationals tagged on for non-apparent reason.)

To justification. Lindsay Hassett used sometimes to open the innings, when he played his deadest-bat defensive strokes with a mischievously conscious air of exaggeration; and all, whether attacking or defending,

with a neat-footed air of unhurry; enjoying — as he did in that long string of maidens at Trent Bridge in 1948 — something approaching perfection in footwork. He was the absorbing master miniaturist.

Although he was not generally an opening bat, Charlie Macartney effectively went in first on the day of his great innings at Headingley in 1926, when he was in at the fall of the first wicket in the first over. Dropped at slip from his fourth ball, he went on to make his historic and exciting century before lunch. In any case, any team of entertaining Australian cricketers would have to make Macartney a very early choice indeed. Short, compact and quick on his feet, he had all the strokes and a generous urge to play them. He was a Test slow left-arm bowler in his early days; but he must always be remembered as the adventurer batsman.

Sir Don? Yes, indeed, especially before the Second World War, when he moved down the pitch like a dancing master and changed the look of cricket record breaking with his fluency, will to attack, and the most infallible murder of the bad ball the game has known. There was, too, his running, picking-up and throwing, which was in the line of Australian out fielding perfection. So many other builders of the long scores have looked ponderous; the Don never was; his bat was as quickly sensitive and pertinently applied as a surgeon's scalpel.



Power and majesty

Stan McCabe was the gallant; classically, at Trent Bridge in 1938; that was an innings of power and majesty yet played with his characteristic dash which captured the imagination of the young in a fashion they still kept in mind in old age.

Post-war Britain needed the splendid, even the extravagant, and, once again, Anglo-Australian cricket rose to the demand of the age with Miller and Compton in their splendid encounters — fast bowler against dashing batsman — in epic performance. Miller was, too, a glorious free-striking batsman and a great — sometimes acrobatic — slip fieldsman. He had been a fighter pilot in the war, so in his perspective cricket could never be a life-or-death matter. He enjoyed all life, expressed himself in play of quite glorious panache; and was splendid company; for that matter, still is. Ken Mackay, ironically called 'Slasher', was that rare batsman, the stonewaller of inescapable character; constant chewer, eccentric runner-up to bowl. A philosophic but valuable and unfailingly competitive player.

Captain supreme

Richie Benaud will captain this side, Bradman notwithstanding. He took decisions as by second nature; and, having taken them, would, as he judged, stick with them — as at Old Trafford in 1961 — or was flexible enough to change course. Good leg-spinner — look at his figures — batsman capable of either game; outstanding close catcher; fluent talker; able to motivate others; a natural captain — and his record proves it.

He did not mind that they called him 'Iron Gloves'; Rodney Marsh was, quite deliberately, almost a caricature of an Australian when he put on the swagger. In fact, he was a kindly creature, something of an idealist; a constantly improving wicketkeeper to the top; a better batsman than many thought; a faithful friend and a true competitor. Certainly he threw himself about, sometimes apparently clumsily, but fearlessly and with immense effect.

England, in 1948, echoed with the portmanteau-word 'Lindwall-'n'-Miller': the towering Australian fast-bowling pair who routed the home batting in utterly dramatic fashion. Ray Lindwall (pictured, left) was the artist, capable of both swings, a deadly yorker, change of pace, immaculate control and an artful tactical sense. Could hit, too; and was among the more companionable of cricketers.



Australia has long been the nursery of wrist-spinners;

yet it is doubtful if they have ever produced a finer practitioner of the 'Chinaman' than Jack Walsh. Born in Australia, he played most — and all of his best — cricket in England, for Leicestershire and never — what a waste — for Australia. A perfectionist, he bowled several left-arm variations; baffling, in 1948 he took more wickets than anyone else in England.

A happy cricketer, he could catch, and swing a bat fairly lustily, too; but most of all he will be remembered as one who loved spin bowling and probed all its possibilities to the point of excellence.

A legendary wrist-spinner; the best cartoonist, probably the best water-colourist and one of the finest reporters among modern cricketers, Arthur Mailey was well loved. He bowled leg-breaks and googlies of prodigious spin if not always utter accuracy. As with some other relishable cricketers he was too wise to believe that the game was the be-all and end-all of existence, but few have enjoyed it — nor been enjoyed — more greatly.

England

Turning to England, a few old rivalries will be revived. For instance, twice in Test matches Mailey bowled Jack

Hobbs — first man in for England — with a full-toss. It was, perhaps, the measure of the difference between cricket then and now that they both burst out laughing. Hobbs set many records; despite a late start, the years lost to the First War and others to injury and illness, he scored more centuries than anyone else. That shrewd assessor, Wilfred Rhodes, insisted, too, that he might have made twice as many if he had not so often given it away' at 60 or 70 to allow others in Surrey's long batting order of the 1920s to have a knock. He strolled through an innings; The Master, indeed; he made the game seem desperately simple. Yet to watch him in his utter perfection of stroke play was fascinating: it was to learn more about the art of the game than any lecturer, demonstrator or coach could have taught. There was, too a repose and rhythm to be sensed in the art of this quiet and gentle man.

Colin Milburn (Pictured, below, right) may look an odd partner for Sir Jack,

but he brought a great gust of fresh air into the game of his day. The lustiest and least inhibited of hitters, yet he was no slogger; a sharp eye and good timing invested his



play with a polish his huge bulk seemed to deny. A man, too, of courage; as he has shown since the cruel injury that robbed him of his effective cricketing eyesight.

The senior figure of the second half of the inter-war period in England was Walter Hammond; a patrician figure if ever the game knew one. His very walk to the wicket was majestic; and once there, he rolled out superb strokes as if incapable of an ungraceful movement. If his cover-drive was the finest of all time, he had other graces of scoring. He could, and often did — especially for long-term tactical reasons — destroy bowlers; but always gracefully. He might have been an even more effective fast-medium bowler than he was; and there was no better slip in the cricket of his time; he left most memorable pictures in the memory.

Most professional cricketers are serious because they have to be; it is their living. Denis Compton played it as if for fun. Perhaps it was that aspect of their characters that made him and Keith Miller the idols of the cricket-watching females of their day. Compton became the hero of the common man because he made all the weakly human errors of the ordinary club cricketer yet retrieved them by a particular magic of his own. Not apparently a stylist, yet everything was technically right — and decorated with a most diverting hint of absentmindedness.

A perceptive public dubbed Ted Dexter (Pictured, below) 'Lord Edward', and there was indeed an aristocratic air about his batting which sometimes obscured his grit, and almost anxiety to get things right. A peremptory, controlled and stylish striker of the ball, he did not linger on the stage, but he could bowl at fast-medium, catch well and captain thoughtfully; and will be remembered with affection among the followers of his time.



If some recent cricket has seemed journeyman, Ian Botham has been the ultimate corrective — and more — to any loss of interest in England. A fearless and mighty striker of the ball; a bowler capable of rising to fast-medium — or even faster — heights; and a prehensile slip catcher, he has touched the heights — more than once. In 1981 he did what no-one else in cricket history has ever done. He took up a Test series which England were assuredly losing and, by his own bowling and batting, almost alone, won the next three — the first incredibly, the second quite surprisingly, the third, well. Constantly, since, he has reminded us of that epic quality in him; and if he cannot command at all times — no-one ever could — he has done so more often than anyone else.

Wilfred Rhodes achieved almost incredible figures as an allrounder. He is, though, here as an entertainer because his slow left- arm bowling, especially watched from sideways-on, was so beguiling in his almost languid rock back and forward, and the cunningly tempting arc of his flight was so compelling until the undetected variation achieved his artfully-planned end.

Some men look physically unprepossessing. Maurice Tate (Pictured, left) did; he had sloping shoulders, wide hips — so valuable for cushioning the delivery-stride jolt — thick legs and huge feet. Several of those attributes were assets in the bowler so aptly described as 'fast-medium through the air, but fast off the pitch'. For several series he carried the English bowling almost alone; for his heart was huge. He was a man of mighty



and convivial humour, who was a good enough batsman to score many centuries opening the Sussex innings; and sometimes seemed virtually indestructible.

Wicketkeepers are generally commended for being 'unobtrusive'; but Godfrey Evans, who served England so long in that capacity, was hardly ever out of the game. If he dropped catches standing up to fast- medium bowlers, he rarely revealed the fact; but he took some great ones, up and back. He was hardly ever still, never gave up and was an immense psychological stimulus to flagging bowlers. Once, too, he scored a crucial Test century against West Indies on a positively evil wicket at Old Trafford: the cricketer of perpetual motion and cheek.



Master craftsman

Jim Laker (Pictured, opposite) was not merely the man who took that unique 19 wickets in a Test; he was an object lesson in bowling. Fascinating — if frequently too astute in his concealment to be fully appreciated even by the opposing batsman — his variations of run, point of release in his approach and in his swing, changes of pace, flight and length were those of a master craftsman; perhaps, indeed, the ultimate artist of off-spin. A fair bat, too, and a useful fieldsman; he yet invested his sharp brain in bowling to the highest level. Fast bowling, Frank Tyson once said, is a feeling. He was happy when his university degree meant that he had a worthwhile job waiting for him when he ceased to be able to bowl truly fast. In Australia, in 1954-55, when, after the defeat at Brisbane, he adjusted to his shorter run, he was, surely, as fast a bowler as the modern game has seen. That little scrabble of the feet, then the smooth acceleration to the peak at which those huge shoulders cantilevered and the ball was hurled down and into the pitch at such pace that even top-class Test batsmen were defeated by sheer speed; a rare event. That was the feeling he wanted. He could bat and catch; has talked, written and broadcast perceptively on the game; but his glory was in bowling fast. What delight there has been in watching these who have so graced the game that they remain, in their greatness, indelibly imprinted on the mind; this is an offering of gratitude for those pleasures.

Your Next Challenge. Pick an all time *touring* party to visit. You can pick 17 players with the following restrictions: All players chosen must have played at least one Test. You must include two regular wicket keepers and nominate a captain. Your team can be from any Test Playing country and all players can span any year, any decade, any era. You can email or even telephone me with your 'touring party'. Contact details are as follows:

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Thank you to Bob Bond for allowing us to use the above. We will be using more in future issues of The VW.

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