

I think it is fair to say that the English cricket season is in full swing and there is no better indicator of where we are than the first England Test squad of the summer being announced. Whilst I wasn't unduly shocked by the squad I was a little surprised.

A few months ago I had watched Robert Key, Nasser Hussain and Mike Atherton on a TV debate (each being at a different location, so effectively a Televised Zoom chat) discussing where England would go next and Key seemed quite adamant that Anderson and Broad, as they wouldn't be around for the next Ashes series, should not be a part of the team and new blood be brought in. Hussein in particular was determined in his view that you pick the best XI. Maybe the new Captain has won his first battle with the recall of Anderson and Broad.

'The Selectors' are persevering with nine players from the squad defeated 1-0 by the West Indies; a further six of that squad were not available for selection due to injury, and Lancashire's Matt Parkinson can count himself very unlucky to have been overlooked in favour of Jack Leach. Ollie Pope with a Test average of less than 30 is to play at No. 3, with former captain Root at 4 and is-he-in or is-he-out Jonny Bairstowe at 5, which means that Harry Brook with nearly 800 first-class runs for Yorkshire *this season* is not going to play, but its ok because with him being a part of the squad he will undoubtedly benefit from the vast experience of playing in the nets — another strange decision, but such decisions are common place with England.

It is refreshing to see that England will continue with a proper wicket-keeper, and that is not a slight on Butler or Bairstowe, but Foakes can save more runs over time than Butler could make at Test level.

It is unrealistic to expect England to make wholesale changes and bring in a whole new squad, the impact on confidence and long-term Test careers would be massive and given the circumstances it is a decent squad, but I still believe that New Zealand will be too good for England.

We all know the county schedule is ridiculous and you all know that I bang on about not playing whole competitions such as the T20 in a narrow window, but surely, please, I beseech you, consider this...Between May 27 and June 7, that is 12 days, every county is playing at least three home games each in the T20.

If I wanted to take my two godsons to one match and my nearest team is Northamptonshire then the petrol, parking, admission and even just a soft drink

and light snack each would cost me £110. That is ONE match - I do not know of many cricket fans who could afford £330 in 12 days to watch the T20. In the last full season when T20 matches were played at Northampton the average attendance was 55% of capacity.

Surely spreading the T20 throughout the summer, along with The Royal London Cup would allow those who want to attend to watch more games.

So Tim has finally gone. I hope he is ok, carrying that £2 million plus in a suitcase will put a lot of strain on his lower back, but lest we not forget that The Hundred will keep him in our memory for a long, long time. Sporting executives from a non-sporting background tend to ignore criticism, the word 'teflon' has been used to describe Harrison and his resignation was met with widespread approval. The Guardian article by Andy Bull "[Tim Harrison brought in the money, but left cricket smaller, poorer and divided](#)" is superb and in my opinion it best reflects what I and countless others truly think.

In my last newsletter I mentioned Wisden 2022 and since then I sent out a simple survey on the 2022 contents and I also asked for readers' views/opinions and I am grateful for all your responses. A selection of which are on pages 11-14 and the survey results are on page 15 - they do make interesting reading — especially the percentage of people who read an article and liked (or in effect, disliked) it. My own comments went down well with readers, but did attract some criticism, I really do need to abandon my right to voice an opinion.

In this newsletter there are a couple of longer articles that I wanted to include, the first is from Peter Corbett and begins on page 2 and the second is on Sherlock Holmes (page 7) - I know, talk about contrast!

I have also included an England v New Zealand competition — its not too difficult, well I would say that.

I ask for your patience with the article on Wisdens and the Pandemic (page 6), it is the first of a series that I hope will give you as much information as possible on where the market is and how the pandemic has impacted upon collecting.

Thank you all

Bill,

Lorraine (who has signed me up to a Pilates class).

Libby (just about finished in Spain).

Abbey (moving to Bristol and starting her new job).

The Problem

About ten years ago it was decided by those responsible for English International Cricket that it would focus on One Day Cricket (so called white ball cricket) with winning the World Cup a priority. However, Test Cricket provides more income than white ball cricket. A winning Test side was considered essential to keep the public interested, and the money flowing, as if losing exciting Tests would result in crowds declining!

Contributing to Test cricket's problems are Counties who have been producing wickets of declining quality for some time. There is evidence that suggests Counties are sometimes more interested in domestic cricket than the fortunes of the Test side. Many ardent County supporters, given the choice, would prefer their county won the Championship than England Test matches. As long as the ECB keep handing over profits from staging Tests then the Counties are unlikely to complain. So in order to assist in winning matches "result" pitches have become common. Counties produced under-prepared wickets that favoured seam and swing bowling and the arts of batting and spin bowling suffered.

This in conjunction with the decision that to give England the best chance of winning home Tests, and helping their principal assets for winning them: Anderson & Broad, wickets for Tests would have more grass left on from the start. This was admitted by Alistair Cook in his autobiography. In addition the Duke ball, which moves and seams and retains the shine for longer than other alternatives, was crucial. Fertilised outfield with a lush covering meant that a ball would retain its shine for almost all of the 80 overs before a new one became available. This plan succeeded and when England were successful for a few years; at home that is, it was a different story abroad, everyone was happy. Except batsmen and spin bowlers of course.

The outcome of this short-sighted policy could be considered a success by some, England did indeed win the World Cup; fortuitously it might be said, but still they won. Meanwhile standards of batting and spin bowling were in apparently terminal decline.

The asinine decision to play all domestic "red ball" cricket in two parts: between the first week of April – beginning of June & the early part of July and the end of September, yes, there was no First-Class county cricket for a month in the middle of the summer but plenty at the beginning and end! Starting so soon and ending so late; you know what batting at both ends of the season can be like, no wonder batting is difficult! As if that was not enough, under contract test batsmen often missed some of these matches!

With a poor preparation, many batsmen promoted from County cricket to the Test team in the last ten

I am indebted to Peter Corbett for this article. A lot of what he writes will ring true with readers.

years, have often looked out of their depth with the considerable step up in class. Often only Root and Cook, and on occasions Stokes, have managed to perform to the standard required on a regular basis. It used to be said that a batsman must be able to average at least 40 to be a success at Test level. After Root & Cook no batsman has averaged better than 28 – 32 since Vaughan, Strauss, Pietersen & Bell *et al* retired. Even Cook often struggled during the era of "green" Test pitches in England.

Spinners have become an endangered species. Ineffective on green pitches they have become more and more marginalised. Spinners need bowling to be effective. Not an odd over occasionally but ten over plus spells. Most spinners must think that if they are hit for a few runs they will be promptly removed and replaced by a seam bowler. Even Shane Warne used to say that the first objective of a spinner, when asked to bowl, is that he ensures he bowls well enough to earn another over.

To return to pitches, such was the disparity in wickets between the different formats, someone from another planet shown cricket for the first time in England in April: green pitches, the ball seaming and moving and batting difficult, then a one-day game in July; straw coloured pitches, the ball not doing as much, batting easier, might ask why are they totally different. He may well ask!

Everyone knows that a poor wicket for a one day match means a low scoring game and few if any "sixes". This was best evidenced in 1975 in the inaugural World Cup at Headingley, when England played Australia in the semi-final on a wicket that was almost the same colour as the outfield. Less than 200 runs were scored for the loss of 16 wickets and the highest individual score was 28. Produce a good fair pitch: well-prepared with a slight tinge of green to start, but largely brown and even paced, for a first class game and bowlers will need to work for their wickets and batsmen can have confidence that the wicket will give them a fair chance.

The actions of the authorities, both test & county, suggest they are terrified that a day comprising 90 overs that finishes circa 275 for 2 will not hold the attention of many spectators. Better an under prepared pitch and 230 all out and 25-2; result; plenty of action and a guarantee of a result. Fine if that is what the majority want. But don't expect batsmen to learn how to bat properly and score sufficient runs to win matches at Test level.

The series just finished in Australia encapsulated virtually all the problems endemic in English cricket. To

begin all five Test were played on pitches with more grass left on them than usually seen. It looked as if Australia had taken a leaf out of England's book: prepare "result" pitches that, unless rain intervenes, guarantee a result. Australia gambled, correctly, that they would bowl and bat better than England. Far too many good length deliveries lifted sharply to stomach/chest height. On a fast true pitch a short ball should rise to this level and higher but not one from a good length. Statistics have shown that more batsmen have been hit in this series than in any previous one, which presumably includes the "Bodyline series" of 1932-33.

Is this really the sort of cricket spectators want to see? Interestingly batsmen on both sides were hit equally as often. England's bowlers did not bowl consistently enough or keep pressure on Australian batsman. For England to win Anderson and Broad would have needed to have been at their best which they weren't. It was a pity that a fit and in form Archer was not available. At his fastest, on those pitches, he may just have produced a frisson of fear in the Australian batsmen. Had he done that in the first test the next four test pitches may not have had quite as much grass and uneven bounce about them! England can't complain; after all they were responsible for producing green pitches for the last Australian visit.

In recent years batting at Test level for England, due to substandard pitches, has been difficult when played at home, India, Australia and to a certain extent, South Africa and West Indies. At home the pitches produced have meant that, however skilful the batsman, he has needed considerable luck to survive for the first 10 overs or so. Not all test pitches around the world are substandard but too many are. Am I alone in feeling dispirited on the first morning of a test in England to find that after an hour the score is 30 for 2 batting has been difficult with the ball moving and seaming about and virtually all the runs off the bat have come through the slips/gully area often off a thick edge? The period before lunch should offer some help to the quicker bowlers. However, bowlers should still have to work for their wickets and batsmen should not have to rely almost entirely on fortune to survive.

Unfortunately the mindset of many batsman in recent times has been poor and shot selection sometimes deplorable. In addition, partly due to lack of confidence, a noticeable lack of foot movement, with batsmen trapped on the crease not playing either forward or back, and playing at wide balls, has contributed to their downfall. It isn't that they can't bat it is simply that they seem unable to concentrate on survival during difficult periods. The prevailing philosophy is that you must not let the bowler dictate. That is all very well but playing an injudicious stroke and getting out is hardly the answer. They seem unable to play what Geoff Boycott describes as "positive batting in defence". Shouldering arms to good length

balls outside off stump in a positive manner sends a message that you are not going to flash at such deliveries. Bowlers are more likely to bowl straight if they think that batsmen are not going to "nibble" at wide deliveries.

It is worth considering that top overseas batsmen have also struggled in England in recent years. However, as England won more tests than they lost most cricket followers, apart from a few purists like me, seemed to think there was nothing amiss.

Another by product of grassy pitches with uneven bounce is that batsmen are unwilling, understandably, to play forward in defence to quick bowlers. This results in most playing uncertainly from the crease leaving them vulnerable to full length deliveries that move off the seam or through the air. Even Root, comfortably England's best batsmen technically, has been caught behind and in the slips too often playing at balls that could be left alone. With the modern fashion for leaving the third man area unprotected, it can be profitable for batsmen to run the ball to that position. However, so often this can result in batsmen edging the ball for a catch in the slips/gully area.

Some Test pitches in India have been particularly bad in recent times. Notably last year during the series against England. No Test pitch worthy of the name should ever take as much spin before the third day as some of those did. It was a travesty of sport in one test to see a spinner bowling before lunch on the first day with the ball turning sometimes at least a foot, and men around the bat. Again England can have no complaints: the pitches for India in 2018, the Oval apart, had plenty of grass on them.

Coaching at the lower level in England can sometimes be well below standard. However, it is the ethos of many coaches that is the main problem. From my observations many young boys & girls have the ability to bat correctly. The coaches are not always helping them.

My neighbour; a girl of fourteen could bat and bowl well enough to play for Suffolk. At Plashwood there is a cricket net where I bowled at her and batted against her bowling. I also went and watched her practise and play. If I bowled outside the off stump, correction: used a dog thrower, I can't get my arm that high any longer, she would flail at the ball. I said No! You can only get out trying to hit that. "My coach says I should try to hit those" she said. Well, I saw Suffolk girls play four times that season, they were 40 over matches and on no occasion did they bat longer than 23 overs. I said I know what your coach says; but the team must try to bat the whole 40 overs. In all four matches hardly any girl shouldered arms to a ball of good length outside off stump or played forward defensively. Most of the time an aggressive shot was attempted. What is needed of course is to learn when to play defensively

and when to attack in order to see out the full 40 overs.

From what I can see some coaches are full of ridiculous theories, one example, batting on one leg to supposedly help balance. Ever seen this? It is guaranteed to make the batsman fall over! Indoor winter nets were two hours, yet sometimes as little as half an hour was spent on technical issues. Plenty of time was spent on various activities: team bonding, which has its place, but has little to do with improving their cricket on a technical level.

English cricket must decide how important Test Cricket is to the nation. Is winning everything? The balance of the game at both county and test level has been changed far too much in the favour of seam and swing bowling. Batting and spin bowling have been marginalised and sacrificed to give England her best chance of winning. The IPL, Big Bash *et al* also cause problems that must somehow be overcome.

Those tasked with running the game face an uphill challenge to improve red ball cricket. They must ensure that all involved are supportive of the changes needed.

The Solution

A complete change of attitude is needed. Even if the decision to implement the following recommendations or similar ones, were taken today, it will be between 5 - 10 years for matters to improve enough to notice a significant difference. However, remember what, I think it was, Confucius said: "Even a journey of a 1,000 miles must begin with a single step". Another axiom that English cricket authorities might consider: "You do not fail when you fall, you only fail when you refuse to get up again". There will be setbacks, but reverting to present methods must be resisted.

One problem that has beset English cricket since the Second World War is how best to nurture youngsters with the talent to play at First-Class level. Even today a large percentage of First-Class cricketers were educated at private schools. This is clearly because cricket facilities and coaching are better at fee paying institutions. State school facilities for cricket are often either very poor or non-existent. This is partly due to most children finishing the school term for the summer holidays when there is almost three months of the season remaining.

Plenty of state school children, particularly boys, who have an aptitude for sports do not choose to play cricket when they leave school. It is now excepted that, unlike before 1940, football is the game most boys want to play. Although this is a situation that must be lived with, efforts to make cricket attractive to youngsters must be made, without surrendering its integrity. Cricket must be fun, but good coaching must concentrate on improving each players technical

ability. How often is it said that cricket is a simple game. However, theorists sometimes equipped with a damaging ego, seem not to be aware of this.

There is action that must be taken immediately if First Class cricket in England is to regain any position of prominence at test level. One does not wish to be abusive about men that were only doing their jobs as they saw fit, however, in recent years there is evidence; the Stanford millions only the worst example, that the ECB have demonstrated an obscene tendency to see only the amount of revenue to be made when running cricket. There is no other conclusion to be drawn. Over-crowded schedules with demands on players guaranteed to leave them exhausted both mentally and physically. Covid failed to stem the greed. Far too much cricket was arranged forcing players into "bubbles" that left some with psychological issues. This bordered on abuse.

Stokes' career must have come close to foundering completely and bravely as he tried in Australia it was clear he was some way below his best. Root's career may not be as long as it should be due to the pressure he has endured since he became captain. It is reported that he wishes to continue. He should be sacked for his own good never mind England's. He has done an excellent job in very difficult circumstances. However, no captain can continue indefinitely without his message becoming stale. Cook saw this and gave up the captaincy and later retired from Test cricket prematurely when he felt he could not offer any more; he was 33 and should have had 3-4 more years.

A complete re-think is required; simply there must be less cricket. How often is it said that less is more. Leave the spectator eager for more not sated to the level where he is feels bloated. Attending International cricket in England is very expensive, the least those digging deep into their pockets deserve is the certain knowledge that the players are fit, mentally and physically, to provide the days entertainment. There has been a tendency in recent years to insert more cricket at every opportunity to a point where it is not possible for the players to be at their best at all times. Never mind: just look at the days takings! It is entirely possible that over the next ten years, if nothing is changed, some International players who, if treated properly, may have played almost to the age of forty are happy to retire in their early thirties. The ridiculous policy of rotation, who dreamt that one up, failed simply because it was not properly thought through.

When covid struck about the only idea that never seemed to occur to administrators was playing less international cricket! It was wonderful that some cricket was possible without spectators to entertain those stuck at home, but asking too much of the players seemed the least of their concerns.

County Championship matches must be played through the season starting from the first week in May and ending the second week in September. Two divisions will mean that each county plays either 18 or 14 matches. Matches should be played Tuesday to Friday. White ball cricket can be staged Saturday to Monday. Test matches should be staged from the second week in June until the last week in August Thursday – Monday and not in the middle of September. If this means less white ball cricket then so be it.

Counties must be instructed to prepare pitches that are predominantly straw coloured with even bounce and very few green areas. Test pitches should be of the highest quality with priority given to an even bounce and straw in colour. The aim should be that pitches should start to wear enough to take spin from, circa, tea on the third day in county matches and lunch on the fourth day in Tests. Pitches that fail to reach this standard should result in penalties for the offending grounds. Nothing sharpens the mind more acutely than a fine. Flat, lifeless pitches are as bad as the ones currently produced and should also be punished. The Duke ball should be discontinued as soon as possible and replaced by one that does not seam and move about so much. This may seem very draconian but soon enough groundsmen will be producing suitable wickets. It was done in the past so with modern turf technology it should not be a problem. This is essential if England are to learn to regularly build totals large enough to win Test matches.

English administrators should make it a condition when arranging tours, both home and away, that good quality fair wickets are produced and the same type of ball should be used for all matches. NOT the Duke! No more pitches in England with too much grass, or ones taking spin from the first over in India, or like those during the winter in Australia with too much grass on them and unreliable bounce. Surely if Test Cricket is regarded as the highest level of the game then the surface, and ball should not provide any marked advantage to either batsman or bowler. On the subject of tours at least two first-class matches should be played prior to the first test. It is absurd that players are expected to fly in, acclimatise in a couple of days, have a nets for a couple more, then straight into a Test. Bonkers.

There has been the suggestion that English cricketers be either “red ball or white ball” players. While this is an excellent suggestion, it is hard to see how this will work. However, if this becomes a reality, a Test squad of 15 or 16 players could be named that will play predominantly Test cricket with sufficient county matches to maintain form. Of the current England Test batsmen probably only Hameed, still young and talented enough to correct his technical issues.

Crawley, needs more discipline but would benefit from these changes, Root, Pope, needs better shot selection, and Sibley who has been working on his technique, there is nothing wrong with his patience and application. These look specialist Red Ball players. It would be difficult decision but Stokes, must decide for himself what he wishes to be. Asking him to play both red and white ball cricket at the top level all year round is likely to render him below standard at both, not to mention expediting his retirement.

Malan, Bairstow and Buttler are probably better suited to white ball cricket and have probably each played their last test. This may seem harsh but all three have demonstrated that their techniques do not stand up at Test level in the long term, together with their ages are against them changing at this stage. Sadly Burns, a likeable and determined individual, has too many technical faults at Test level.

Of the bowlers Anderson, Broad, Robinson Wood plus Leach are the obvious bowlers to play only red ball cricket. Others need to be added. All red ball bowlers need to be kept from overuse but should play some county championship cricket. Remaining injury free has been a problem with some of our quicker bowlers in recent times and the leading bowlers can't be expected to play all the year round without breaks. The wicket keeping duties look safe in the hands of Foakes and Billings. How much white ball cricket they play should be controlled.

I can see administrators reacting in horror to much of this and thankful that they can prevent any of these suggestions ever seeing the light of day. “What is this idiot saying”! If we implement this it will reduce our income so much that our contributions to the counties etc will be decimated”. The response to this is simple: if cricket needs to be conducted in the present manner to keep everything afloat, then a drastic re-organisation of cricket is more urgent than anyone had previously thought. Unless of course a future of largely white ball cricket is the intention.....

The clock is ticking; many think that the current model is broken and beyond repair. The above suggestions may not be ideal but they at least provide a starting point for discussion. There can be no argument in favour of the *status quo*, something has to be done. It is time for a different mindset to save the future of Test & First-class cricket in England.

The Wisdener would like to thank Peter Corbett for taking the time to write this article.

Wisdens and the Pandemic

When Boris Johnson announced the first lockdown I like many people had absolutely no idea what the following months were going to be like. As a family we were very fortunate, both our girls came home and for both that was difficult, leaving University and friends and with uncertainty as to when normal life would resume.

Lorraine and I sat down with the girls on the first day of lockdown and we were honest. I had no idea on the impact the Pandemic and lockdown would have on my business and I honestly told the girls that I expected not a single sale for at least three months — that was the way I had to deal with it. The girls were wonderful, each offering to put any money they had into the family kitty and all of us committing to be careful on what we spent and on what we bought — across the country millions were in the same position.

I made decisions in those first few days and weeks that in complete honesty I had no idea if they would be right or wrong. I contacted my printers to see if I could increase the print run and frequency of The Wisdener and I was told that it was unlikely that they would be remaining open — my printers of twelve years would not be opening! I made contact with other printers and realised that the price I was paying was substantially lower than the prices others were quoting me.

The cost of sending out The Wisdener to more people and more regularly was simply not an option. It was Lorraine who suggested taking the newsletter online. I had always promised that this would never happen but my options were limited. It was also Lorraine who suggested trying to send a newsletter out bi-weekly or 'as often as possible' without being a nuisance — this was a tricky decision — those of you who know me hopefully know that I do not like to pester. Lorraine's reasoning was that a lot of people, especially older people, would be isolating and a little bit of light reading every few weeks might be a nice thing to do.

Initially I also offered 20% off all Wisdens until the Pandemic was over — this was done to encourage sales but also for the same reason for putting out the newsletter more frequently — if people were in lockdown and a Wisden was a little cheaper to purchase the boredom might be a tad less. At the time I had no idea on what the impact would be.

Taking The Wisdener online meant that the circulation almost doubled overnight and in two years it has quadrupled — this is not a justification it is simply a fact. The early editions of The Wisdener online were pretty basic and my front page musings were a reflection of what we as a family were doing, with no cricket and in the early days no prospect of cricket, I just wanted to get something out.

For those of you who haven't seen any of the earlier

I have been thinking about writing this for a while and I wasn't sure, but here goes. I wanted to write about the Pandemic and its impact on the Wisden market, but in order to do so I wanted to give you a little background on where I, Wisdenworld and the Furmedges were as the first lockdown began.

Next time I will write about what happened in those early months with the prices and availability of the almanack and I will also be honest in my view as to what the short term and medium term repercussions will be for collectors.

Thank you for reading.

Bill (I apologise if I am a little too personal in the article)

Wisdenerers and you wish to do so, here is a link - [A LINK](#) I know they weren't brilliant, but they were done with the best intentions.

In my mind if I committed to producing a newsletter as frequently as possible then at least if Wisden sales were poor I had something to do, something to occupy me and I even made plans to publish one or two books, including The Wisdener Manual Volume Two. I have been truly blessed over the years that I have been doing Wisdenworld that I have always been busy and the feeling of incredible uncertainty (felt by millions, not just me) did have an impact on me, so anything I could do, revenue-generating or not, to fill my time, I tried to do.

Those first few days and weeks were uncertain. As a result of lockdown all the appointments that I had made to view collections had to be cancelled. The government guidelines did allow essential business to continue and there were people I was due to visit who were quite perturbed that I cancelled, which in itself was worrying. I did not view my business or going to view Wisden collections as an essential business and more importantly I did not feel it was right to put anyone I was seeing in any kind of potential danger, mask or no mask.

By early April of 2020 my family and friends were arranging and taking part in various on-line quiz's, with friends on Zoom mostly and I decided to do a quiz for Wisdener readers. Again Lorraine came up with the idea that rather than do it in the newsletter that I actually telephoned people. The first IQ (Isolation Quiz) had 168 participants and the overwhelming feeling I got from doing it was one of feeling very humbled and very blessed as around 80% of those I called were self-isolating so my idea to allocate 15 minutes for each person to answer the set of questions soon went out of the window and I did not mind in the least.

In May 2020 I did a second IQ (IQ2 would you believe) and it attracted 202 entrants

Talking to the family, trying to remain positive and committing to doing some things were the start, but I still had no idea what would happen in the world of Wisdens, but for sure I wasn't expecting what came next.

Cricket and Sherlock Holmes

The celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes, with his fondness for the detection of crime would seem, at first glance, to have little in common with cricket. Holmes was far more at home delving into the seamy side of life than in healthier fields. We must not forget, however, that the originator of Holmes was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Below, Centre), and he was a very keen cricketer and sportsman.

Conan Doyle applied to join the Edinburgh C.C. when only fifteen years old then played football as a young doctor at Southsea. He played cricket for over thirty years, and took up golf in later life. He was Captain of Cricket at Stonyhurst College and all his life was passionately fond of outdoor sport. His other stories reflect his love for outdoor sports — Rodney Stone in particular with its portrayal of Regency England and boxing in that era. Conan Doyle's love of sport was capped by the distinction of appearing, late in life, in First-Class cricket.

My attention was drawn to The Singular Mystery of Mr. Sherlock Holmes quite recently. During a period of convalescence I was reading a critique of the Holmes stories by the eminent author, Vincent Starrett. When questioned about the origin of "Sherlock" as a name, Doyle was reported to have said: "Years ago, I made thirty runs against a bowler by the name of Sherlock and I always had a kindly feeling for the name". I had not previously heard of "a bowler named Sherlock" although, of course, it is possible that someone of that name played in club cricket. There was once a player named Silverlock who played with Monmouthshire prior to World War I, but Sherlock was a mystery. It seems to me to be much more likely that our hero's name was derived from Mordecai Sherwin and Frank Shacklock, who in the eighties and nineties, both played for Notts. Doyle, who played a lot of club cricket in that period, was very likely to have known both players in M. C. C. minor matches.

Mordecai Sherwin first appeared for Notts in 1876 and played for seventeen years. He was unfortunate to be contemporary with Pilling and MacGregor otherwise he may have been first choice for England. He did visit Australia in 1886-87 and kept wicket for England v Australia at Lord's in 1888. He was over seventeen stones, a large, bulky, ruddy faced man who also kept goal for Notts County. He stood for Parliament in 1887 — an almost unheard of thing at that time for a professional cricketer. He was a cheerful companion and sang popular songs of the period very well....In short a social type whom Doyle would have enjoyed.

Frank Shacklock, who was born in 1861, played his first cricket in Scotland where he could easily have



A friend of mine decided during the various lockdowns to re-read as many Sherlock Holmes books as he could get his hands on. He became quite obsessive.

By chance I received an email from Ted Fletcher who asked if the article on the following pages would be of interest to Wisdener readers - I loved reading it and I hope readers do too.

As for my friend he read it and then went back into many of the Holmes books 'just to have another look', his words, not mine.

I believe the article first appeared in a Cricket Society journal circa 1979/1980 (I apologise if the date is incorrect), and it was written by John I. Marder, President of the United States Cricket Association. John Marder was influential in forming the US Cricketing Association in 1965.

met Doyle who was then playing in Edinburgh. Shacklock was very successful in Scottish cricket, taking 250 wickets in 1883. He went to Surrey, but that club did not give him the chance that he desired, and he appeared for Derbyshire, the county of his birth, in 1884 and 1885. Derbyshire cricket was at a low ebb, and the county was soon to experience relegation to minor county status. In 1886, therefore, Shacklock started to play for Notts, for whom he was qualified by residence. He was quite successful and in the late eighties many batsmen were dismissed "c Sherwin b Shacklock". He had good length as a bowler, with an off break which required watching. He was an early swerve bowler, and did well in First-Class cricket, until an unfortunate quarrel in 1893 led to a parting of the ways. He then went out to New Zealand and as late as 1909 distinguished himself with the bat, scoring 162 not out, out of a team total of 190 made in eighty minutes.

The hypothesis advanced for the origin of "Sherlock" encouraged me to analyse the Sherlock Holmes stories further and to see to what extent cricketers figured as characters therein. I was far more successful in the hunt than I would have imagined. There are four novels and 56 short stories in the Holmes cycle and, according to my compilation, there are 402 characters. One would have to deduct the "foreign" names used to delineate French, German, Italian, Greek or other nationalities in the stories. Of the 343 "English" names, I have been able to trace well over 200 to cricketers of the period. Doyle used so called "foreign" names for his foreign characters, but showed curious affinities. For example he used "La Rothiere" as a French name for entirely different characters in The Second Stain and The Bruce-Partington Plans although La Rothiere is anything but a common French name. Could he have meant "The Rotter"? He was also particularly partial to "Stein" to

denote Germans; he used Steiner, Steiler, Oberstein, Ornstein etc., repeatedly.

An indication of the possibility that Doyle used names of cricketers in the stories is given in the story *The Adventure of the Blue Peter* which appeared in the *Strand* magazine for March 1904, and was probably written late in 1903. One of the characters in the story is John Hopley Neligan. In the season of 1903 a cricketer named C. E. Neligan played for Epsom, a club against whom Doyle often appeared, and F. J. V. Hopley played for Harrow. The first Holmes story appeared in 1887 and Doyle after the initial successes, began to regard his creation as an unmitigated nuisance. He tried to assassinate Holmes without success, and by public demand the stories continued until 1927. As much as Holmes tried to write other material, everything else is largely forgotten but Holmes continues to live on to this day....A lively centenarian.

In examining the names in the stories, and comparing them to cricketers one has to be careful to take cricketers of the same period, otherwise the comparison is inaccurate. Doyle repeated himself from time to time, using the same name for different characters in different stories at least forty times, showing that his imagination could contrive a complicated detective story but did not extend to naming his characters. Once he forgot himself, and used the name of Mrs. Turner as the landlady of Holmes, instead of the immortal Mrs. Hudson. Perhaps Mrs. Hudson had taken herself off to Brighton for a well earned holiday! Doyle used the names Mason, Johnson, Wilson, and Evans at least four times over in various stories, and these were his favourite names.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself was no mean cricketer. He first played as a youngster in Edinburgh, and at Stonyhurst he played in house matches, graduated to the School XI and became Captain of Cricket. Stonyhurst was in Lancashire and was somewhat out of the way to play the better known schools, in that era, but the fixture list did include some of the best clubs in the district.

After leaving school he kept up his cricket, playing first in Edinburgh, then later on for many years in the London area. He played for Esher, Marlborough Blues, Incogniti, Lythe Hill, M. C. C. and for the Authors XI, of course, in their annual matches with the Artists and the Clergy. There were also some famous battles for the Allahakbarries, that eccentric team raised by Sir James Barrie, the title of which is supposed to have meant "God Help Us". Barrie's whimsicalities added much to the scene, and A. E. W. Mason, Sir Bernard Partridge, Owen Seaman (Editor of *Punch*) and other notabilities appeared. In 1898, playing for the team

against the Artists, Doyle partnered Barrie for the last wicket. Barrie invariably appeared at number 11, unless the team played twelve a side. Doyle had batted through the innings and was 94 not out. Attempting a big hit, he was caught on the boundary. As he walked out with Barrie, the latter shook his head and muttered "Careless of you to get out like that Doyle, when we were both going for our hundred". Barrie's score was six not out which was his highest for the season!

On August 23, 24 and 25 1900 Conan Doyle made his first appearance in First-Class cricket. At the ripe age of 41 he played for M. C. C. v London County. London County was an aggregation of cricketers grouped around W. G. Grace, who had left Gloucestershire in 1899 to found the Club, and playing their home games at Crystal Palace. After their application to join the County Championship had been denied, they were given First-Class status for their matches with the big counties. On that bright day in August 1900 Doyle in his first top class game came up against W. G. The Champion was in his 52nd year, a bearded veteran with more than a hundred centuries to his name, and a living legend. He could look back on a career which spanned forty years. Doyle was obviously delighted to play against him, and at Lord's, the scene of so many of Grace's triumphs.

London County scored 138 in their first innings and M. C. C. replied with 135. Batting eighth in the order, Doyle was caught by Dick Lilley behind the wicket off Frank Field for 4. The Warwickshire players were appearing for London County by invitation of W. G. — no other qualification was needed! When London County batted the second time W. G. was in fine form and hit the bowling all over the field. M. C. C. were short of bowling, but in the first innings Thompson of Northamptonshire and Cranfield of Gloucester had done all that was necessary.

The only other recognised bowler was Handford of Notts who was tried and found wanting. The desperate skipper then asked Storer the wicket keeper to take off his pads and bowl, but he too was unsuccessful. It was then that Doyle was asked to bowl — fifth change. He went on, and to his great delight, the first ball in his third over had W. G. caught behind the wicket. The Old Man had made 110 out of his side's 183 for five and it was his 121 century in first class cricket. The match fizzled out as a draw, but Doyle was so delighted that he burst out into verse as follows:

Once in my hey-dey of cricket
Oh day I shall ever recall
I captured that glorious wicket
The greatest, the grandest, of all.

He gives a vivid glimpse of W. G. at the wicket, which has seldom been bettered:

With the beard of a Goth or a Vandal
His bat hanging ready and free
His great hairy hands on the handle
And his menacing eyes upon me.

Doyle goes on to describe his own shortcomings as a bowler and his temerity in sending down an over to the great cricketer:

And I — I had tricks for the rabbits
The feeble of mind or of eye,
I could see all the duffer's bad habits
And guess where his ruin might lie.

The capture of such might elate one
But it seemed like some horrible jest
That I should serve tosh to the great one
Who had broken the hearts of the best.

He describes how W. G. tried to lift one of his balls out of the ground, but his bat was too low and the ball ballooned into the air:

Good Lord, was it mine! Such a soarer
Would call for a safe pair of hands
None safer than Derbyshire Storer,
And there, face uplifted, he stands.
Wicket-keep Storer, the knowing.
Wary and steady of nerves
Watching it falling, and growing.
Marking the pace and the curve.
I stood with my two eyes on it
Paralysed, helpless, inert:
There was "plunk" as the gloves shut upon it.
And he cuddled it up in his shirt.

Doyle closed by describing W. G's exit:

Walking, he rumbled and grumbled
Scolding himself and not me:
One glove off, and he fumbled
Twisting the other one free.
Did I give Storer the credit?
The thanks he so splendidly earned?
It was merely empty talk if I said it.
For Grace was already returned.

The match was the only First-Class match in which Doyle appeared during 1900. He had already written 26 Holmes stories by this time and was one of England's best known novelists. In 1901, besides writing *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the third of the novels in which Holmes appears, he played three games for the M. C. C. against Leicestershire, Derbyshire and London County, all at Lord's. Grace got his wicket in the London County match after Doyle had

played a neat little innings of 21 not out in the first innings. He was definitely at home in First-Class cricket as he showed by scoring 32 not out against Leicestershire, and 28 against Derbyshire. His brother in law, E. W. Hornung also played cricket, and wrote the famous Raffles stories, in which the hero played cricket for the Gentlemen by day and was a burglar by night. Hornung often played with Doyle in minor matches, but the relationship between the brothers-in-law were somewhat strained by family quarrels(l).

In 1902 he again played for M. C. C. against Derbyshire and London County. He got his highest score in First-Class cricket, a creditable 43 before W. G. had him stumped as he was jumping out to hit the innocuous slows the "Old Man" was fond of sending down. In 1903 he appeared against Kent at Lord's in his only First-Class match of the year. He was now 44 years old and had just been knighted by Edward VI I.

He wrote three new Holmes stories during the year and added ten more in 1904. It was his largest output since 1893, and by public demand. During 1904 he played two games in First-Class cricket, for M. C. C. against London County and Kent. In ten First-Class games he had batted eighteen times, had scored 220 runs with an average of 18.33 — not exactly Bradman-like but by no means unsatisfactory. He bowled 41.4 overs (usually on about fifth change) and achieved one maiden, had fifty runs scored off him and never got another First-Class wicket after dismissing Grace! He must surely be the only bowler who wrote a poem to celebrate his one and only victim. Another singular feature of Sir Arthur's First-Class career is that all of his games were played in London.

In Minor cricket he was a fine player who fully kept up his form for many years. For the Authors against the Artists in 1904 he scored 27, going in first and took five wickets with his bowling. P. G. Wodehouse, that later addict to golf, went in last and hit up 44. As an American cricketer I note also that Doyle played for M. C. C. v Haverford College at Lord's and scored 41 not out. It was his only appearance against an American team.

It is not proven, of course, that Sir Arthur drew most of his characters from cricketers of his period, but I am advancing the hypothesis that he did. In Holmes' very first case, *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes describes that on March 4, 1881, he and Watson are driving "furiously for the Brixton Road". From Baker Street he would go by Vauxhall Bridge Road, and along the Harleyford Road, passing the Oval where the first match between England and Australia in England had taken place some six months previously. That fact may certainly have been in Doyle's mind as he sat down to pen the famous series. The intimates of Holmes, too, can be traced to cricketers of the period, his brother Mycroft

being, perhaps, the famous Derbyshire player of that time. Undoubtedly he played many times with Doyle in M. C. C. matches. To illustrate the extent to which Doyle utilised names which are certainly those of cricketers, we can indulge in a mythical match and set down two teams of famous cricketers who also appeared as characters in the stories of Sherlock Holmes.

England

J. B. Hobbs (*The Red Circle*, 1911)

A. C. MacLaren (*The Three Students*, 1904)

F. S. Jackson (*The Crooked Man*, 1893)

P. F. Warner (*Wisteria Lodge*, 1908)

T. Hayward (*The Resident Patient*, 1893)

J. T. Brown (*Silver Blaze*, 1892)

A. P. Lucas (*Second Stain*, 1904)

J. W. H. T. Douglas (*Valley of Fear*, 1914)

S. F. Barnes (*Shoscombe Old Place*, 1927)

J. Hunter (*Silver Blaze*, 1892)

N. A. Knox (*Valley of Fear*, 1914)

This team made over 200 appearances in total for England, and is composed of famous cricketers, all of them making an appearance in the Sherlock Holmes stories as indicated. They would oppose a *Rest of the World* eleven which would contain equally famous cricketers...

W. L. Murdoch - Australia (*The Valley of Fear*, 1914)

J. J. Lyons - Australia (*Hound of the Baskervilles*, 1901)

S. E. Gregory - Australia (*Silver Blaze*, 1892)

A. J. Hopkins - Australia (*The Black Peter*, 1904)

H. J. H. Scott - Australia (*The Valley of Fear*, 1914)

J. H. Sinclair - South Africa (*Bruce Partington Plans*, 1908)

W. W. Armstrong - Australia (*The Missing Three Quarters*, 1904)

C. T. B. Turner - Australia (*Scandal in Bohemia*, 1891)

H. Carter - Australia (*The Valley of Fear*, 1914)

J. V. Saunders - Australia (*The Dancing Men*, 1903)

E. Jones - Australia (*The Sign of Four*, 1890)

If critics ask 'Where are the players from other Test countries?' I can reply that none of them were a force in cricket in Sir Arthur's day, when naturally he would be unfamiliar with their players.

In my estimation the Holmes stories abound in reference to cricketers of the period. If one accepts the hypothesis that Doyle was a fine cricketer (he was); that he had large acquaintance with professional cricketers of the period (he did) and that he had a good memory (he had) then the assumption that he used the names of many cricketers in his stories is not so far fetched. If it were not for enforced convalescents I would not have stumbled onto this interesting sidelight. Glancing at my notes I find that "young Stamford" who introduced Holmes to Watson in the

first story can be a possible reference to The Earl of Stamford, ex-President of the M.C.C who died in 1883, just when Holmes was germinating in Doyle's mind.

I realise, of course, that some of the selections in the two elevens may be a bit forced, but they *are* all characters in the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Of course reference to Smith, Jones, Robinson and Brown in a modern author may point to M. J. K. Smith, A. Jones (the Glamorgan batsman), Emmott Robinson and Freddie Brown, whereas in truth, the author knew nothing about cricket and cared less.

Doyle's case is different. He was a cricketer and he knew and played with the cricketers of the period. Who else could have in mind for Dr Roylott of The Speckled Band than Arthur Rylott, the Leicestershire bowler, with whom he played many times? Such other club cricketers of his period as Trellis, Musgrave and Kemp find a place in his stories, and their names are certainly not common.

The Holmes stories are based on reports of actual cases in nineteenth century England. Holmes himself is based on Dr. Joseph Bell, a professor of Medicine at Edinburgh, who had keen powers of observation.

There is no reason why a cricket enthusiast such as Doyle would not base his minor characters on the names of cricket contemporaries. It would appeal to his sense of humour. I have not mentioned the other famous character — always at the side of Holmes, always ready for a dash into the unknown...a doctor (like Doyle) faithful, kind and loyal (attributes his friends always ascribed to Doyle) and we have the other hero....Dr. Watson. And where can we find his cricketing counterpart? None other than Alec Watson, a Scotsman (like Doyle) who went to Old Trafford and played for Lancashire for 20 years.

Perhaps Sir Arthur would also like to have played First-Class cricket for 20 years too!

Elementary, my dear Doyle!

(Cricket lovers generally and Sherlockians particularly are indebted to John Marder for his fascinating piece of research. It may be mentioned in passing that "Sherlock" and "Baskerville" were Devon club cricketers of the 1870s and 1880s; and that when Kent's W. M. Bradley bowled to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at Lord's in 1903 he set him on fire; the ball thundered upon Sir Arthur's thigh. Splintering a box of matches and setting him alight. "Couldn't get you out — had to set you on fire!" Chuckled W. G.)

The above, final paragraph was printed below the article when it appeared in The Cricket Society Journal

Trudy Cormack

Before anyone criticises the content of Wisden 2022, kindly sit down with a cup of tea or coffee and read Notes by The Editor. Each mini-essay or snippet should prove conclusively that Lawrence Booth and the people behind the almanack have the best interests of the game at heart. Once you have finished your chosen beverage, possibly accompanied by a biscuit or three (I have sort of an addiction for Plain Chocolate McVities digestives), carefully read the article by Azeem Rafiq. 'Carefully' because what is forgotten in the thousands of words that have been put out on the subject, is the simple fact that a cricketer who always dreamed of playing for his county contemplated taking his own life because of the treatment he received by the county he loved. Azeem writes "We recently received death threats" — how in God's name can anyone on this planet not feel for the man and his family when after speaking out against the racism he encountered, others threaten his life?

When you have read and hopefully understood a little more about the disgusting behaviour of some in our game towards non-white players, have a read of Stephen Fry's MCC Cowdrey lecture - Fry is not everyone's cup of tea, but he is nothing else but honest and sincere. He suffered abuse, but maybe the damning words that have been spoken against him are actually just homophobic abuse under the guise of a critique of his lecture, I believe they are.

Other articles shine too - Afghanistan and the Taliban, and Women's Cricket During The War are excellent; the former sad and concerning and the latter educational, hopeful and sincere.

The county sections are the ones most of us may jump to when Bill's package arrives, but this year I went to the articles to make my own mind up on them. I am glad I did, because when I turned to Sussex no-one had re-written the past and made us Champions in 2021. The Ashes section was painful, but true.

The 2022 Wisden will become one of my favourites amongst the 65 we have on our shelves

Paula Lister

Each year when it arrives I turn straight to the Warwickshire section, then I read the account of England in the previous summer or over the winter, then I read the Obituary section. These sections are unique to Wisden, along I am sure with some other sections. But I do not want to read about things I have already read and digested in the news and sporting media.

Frank Burnett

Every year Wisden should win the Sporting Book of the Year Award.

Ray Hodgson

I would like to address something that Bill commented

Over the years I have tried to offer Wisden readers the opportunity to, in effect, 'speak their mind' on topics cricket related. Some comments have offended people and some have raised an eyebrow as to their stance, and it is difficult knowing if allowing what some would see as radical or out-of-date, or even objectionable comments is the right thing to do. The right to 'Free Speech' etc.

There doesn't seem to be another forum apart from online social media where different opinions can be expressed and on social media there is outcry and abuse (rightly or wrongly) when any diverse or controversial opinion is given.

When I asked for feedback on the latest Wisden I did not expect to receive comments and opinions that even I felt were racist or simply 'offensive' but I did and I have made the decision not to include these comments.

I will not apologise for not publishing them - I have to draw the line and I have told those who wrote them that I will not be publishing them and I will be honest here, some were not happy.

What also came through in the responses was that the racism exposed in the Yorkshire set-up is not confined to just Yorkshire.

on in the last Wisden, namely the Cricketana article section and whilst I agree whole-heartedly with the sentiment he put across, I think it is disrespectful to refer to it as 'awful' - I believe irrelevant would be more appropriate.

Christine O'Brady

I would rather Wisden campaign vociferously to change the game we love from one dominated by the one-day game into one in which the longer form of the game is given respect and its rightful place — than go over old news that the intelligent ones amongst us have already watched/read, digested and formed an opinion on.

Oliver Russell

I greatly enjoyed this years' edition. The articles generally offer a different perspective on events and this is needed, but like a lot of people of my generation I don't know whether I want these views in my yearly book on cricket.

Gareth Moody

As always a thoroughly enjoyable read and the diversity of the editorial was a joy.

Carol Morris

Wisden gave me the information I needed to make an informed assessment of the Yorkshire CCC racism scandal — as a Yorkshire CCC member the events and the attitudes made me angry. Having the time line was an excellent idea. I felt informed without being patronised.

This years almanack did not dedicate 1000+ pages to the racism scandal but by some of the press feedback its as if it did, which in my mind is an attack on the publication rather than an acceptance of the problems we have in cricket and society. It is a common ploy — slag off those who are trying to inform and educate whilst ignoring what they are trying to inform and educate us about.

Richard Reardon

I am not a Daily Telegraph reader (The Guardian is my paper of choice) but my friend who is always passes on their Sports sections for me to read as they are good in that respect.

Simon Heffer wrote a damning article in The Telegraph about the Wisden 2022 edition, comparing it to a comic. If you are familiar with his writing it will probably come as no surprise. When he wrote in The Cricket Paper he was always moaning about something. He obviously didn't like the criticism of the ECB and others over the Rafiq scandal. (I did. I thought it was spot on) He moaned that there were not special articles about Dexter and Illingworth apart from their obituaries. Illingworth's obituary is one of the longest articles in the book! Dexter's obituary is just a bit shorter.

I think the new edition is excellent. The quality and subject matter covered in the articles outstanding.

Robin Brodhurst

I'd have added an extra section on which articles did I NOT enjoy. There was only one: the dreadful Cowdrey lecture by Stephen Fry, whom I loathe with a passion. And to think he will be our next MCC President. He's a total narcissist who is only interested in what he can get, and not a true lover of the game. Rant over!

Victor Woodward

Each year I look forward to my new Wisden. Some editions have been a bit run of the mill and dare I say it, rather bland...under Lawrence Booth's editorship this has not been the case. My thoughts on the 2022 are as follows:

*Wisden has an obligation to report the world of cricket, to offer debate and opinion. The 2022 does so in its articles on the

If there was any doubt that Lawrence Booth is a man who not only loves cricket but also understands and respects its values and traditions, just read the very last piece in his 'Notes.'

Andy Collins

'Yorkshire affair.' If anyone reading the articles disagrees, then take your head out from your rear end and join the 21st century, racism is rife and I should know.

*Whilst I read with interest the articles on women's cricket I am a little disappointed that there is hardly a word in support/defence or praise of the Minor Counties or over 50s or over 60s cricket — all three areas have as many players but do not get the funding or the airtime. *My mother watched Stephen Fry on TV once and called him a 'smug little public school s—t' — my mum rarely used such language, but I have inherited her opinion.

*The reports on cricket are as always, a joy...and the Ashes section was incredibly readable, and truthful.

*The Hundred and the other limited-over stuff was given the pages they each merited...they have to be included and thats that.

*Thank you to Bill for pointing out the Heffer article in the DT. I suspect it was pointed out to open up debate...I am so sorry that my mum is not around for her wise and to-the-point thoughts on him and his words, something tells me she would not be as kind as she was in her description of Mr Smug.

Chris Anderson

As always, Wisden is a joy.

Let us not criticise Wisden for talking about issues that reflect upon our game. I found the Azeem Rafiq article uncomfortable to read, but that is my issue, not an issue with he man or the content. I found myself thinking back to recent games at my own club and coming to the sad conclusion that the incidents and attitudes he encountered and spoke about when asked by the select committee are absolutely 100% happening and I have no doubt will continue to happen.

Despite the impact of his words I am sad that the ECB have effectively forgiven Yorkshire because they have made some changes...the punishment needed to be severe. Likewise Ollie Robinson being chosen as one of the 'Five' is not right — a ban for a few games for the things he said does not send out the right message.

One other thing — please get rid of the Schools section, it really is quite an irrelevance and as most schools who are listed are fee-paying, also quite an insult.

Unbelievable and unnecessary comments by the Heffer man. I refuse to call him a journalist, I refuse to acknowledge anything about him. But I do suggest that he takes a look at his diary, glance at the year, 2022 and realise that we are in the 21st Century. Such out-dated and quite appalling views should be confined, like him to history.

Lawrence Booth and Wisden have every right to speak out, to question, to admonish where necessary and to highlight inequality and any form of discrimination in our game. If they also were to ditch the Schools Cricket section that would be another good move.

Regarding the 2022 - one of the most refreshing for years, but too many superfluous articles.

Paul Stephenson

Murray George

As Warwickshire won the proper cricket championship, their captain should be automatically selected as he has not been previously selected. Both Alyssa Healey and Kate Cross should have been chosen, along with Scott Boland.

Alan Moorhouse

Some of the articles in this years edition I found extremely interesting, but as with recent editions I found some rather bland. I read the 'How it Unfolded' Timeline of the Cricket's Racism Scandal which reminded me of the events, then I read both Azeem Rafiq' words and the article by David Hopps - in every possible way they were excellent. Sadly the racism experienced by Rafiq (and no doubt many other cricketers) has been rife for decades. Whether we like it or not cricket is a class-dominated sport and the left-over attitudes of the by-gone years have always been brimming beneath the surface. The bigotry and narrow mindedness of some players left me ashamed. If and it is a genuine 'If' certain ex-England players did say the things that were suggested and in certain cases, could not see the difference between 'banter' and 'racism' then they are only reflecting a pattern in society that seems to be growing.

At my own local club I heard during the course of two matches last summer comments that were at least one of the following; sexist, homophobic or racist and when made the general reaction has been one of giggles and smiles. I stopped going to the club. After over a decade of supporting the club I stopped, I was then contacted by the secretary and when I told 'her' why I wasn't going, her comment was 'but boys will be boys.'

As always the Test reviews and tour analysis was direct, truthful and insightful. I found myself becoming quite angry at Emma John's article, Cricket and Language. I have four daughters, a wife of 28 years and my mother and mother-in-law are both alive and batting...every one of them, including an ex-headmistress (she was never a Head Teacher), an accountant, a health care worker and a teacher — were or are offended by batsman or batswomen, but the word we must now use is 'batters'. I will be called out on that one by some readers, but calling someone a 'batter' does not make me think any more or less of them than if they were referred to as a batsman or batswoman.

Stephen Fry's Cowdrey lecture did not merit a place in Wisden. I will not say anything else on that one. Cricketana - I read it once and found myself bored, so I don't read it any more.

Barry Peters

Wisden is always worth the wait and this year it had a number of solid punches, but like a 12-round Boxing match after the early rounds it tailed off somewhat

into a hard slog — indeed a lot of the articles lacked punch.

It began well, the Yorkshire scandal and associated words were a power-house and the Editors Notes were super, but then the mid-fight blues set in and the rest seemed to offer little.

Just when I thought the contest was picking up with 'Afghanistan and the Taliban, along comes Stephen Fry, who revels in uses whole paragraphs when one sentence would suffice and did he have to use the word 'erection?' It seemed unnecessary. I could spend pages telling me what I thought wrong with his ranting, but read it and make your own mind up. Wisden needs to ditch some of the writing, each year I get bored with the fight and this year I was bored earlier than in previous years.

It is a record of our game, so more about 'the game', 'the matches' than pieces that do tend to be included just to pad out the pages.

Carl Lesley

I can categorically state that in my 23 years of playing local cricket I have never been racially abused, nor have I suffered any form of discrimination owing to the colour of my skin.

It is fair to also say that I have never been discriminated against because of my sexuality, nor on my way to and from cricket practise or indeed on my way anywhere I have never been stopped in the street and searched by the police.

I have, to the best of my knowledge, never been refused a job or overlooked for a promotion owing to my sex, colour or creed. Looking back over my working life, I believe this to be true.

All this talk about racism in Yorkshire cricket, or discrimination in cricket, sport in general or society is completely alien to me.

Wisden 2022 giving articles on such subjects seems odd and strange, some would argue that Wisden needs to start a campaign about better quality food and beverage at county grounds; indeed the quality of the wine does need to be addressed — finding a decent Gavi or Pinot Grigio is an absolute chore at a county ground.

Lawrence Booth should be addressing the fact that once I had joined the MCC waiting list I had to wait almost two seasons before my membership was made full. He should look into the poor parking options at grounds and the disrespect shown to my two sons and their nanny when our Range Rover went slightly across a second parking bay at Hove, rather than harping on about other such matters as girls cricket or someone saying he wasn't spoken to properly back in 2016....But then I am a white, reasonably well-to-do happily married heterosexual family man, what do I know?

John Wadsworth

A great read. I thought last years edition was exceptional — and this years is even better. Wisden needs to be the voice of reason and it needs to stand up for the game. The editor was excellent and reflected what many 'true' cricket fans think. His views on the 'well-rested' England debacle: Root setting the tone in not chasing 270 odd in 53 overs,: Harrison: The lack of non-white county chairs or coaches.....he hits the mark across many topics.

Linda Ewell

When it comes to the articles I find myself reading the opening paragraph and then skipping the rest - I made myself read the Cricket and Racism article and I also read the Editor's Notes, interesting to a point. This is just my opinion but when I look back through Wisdens even from the 1980s and the 1990s there is ignorance and lack of understanding and I am cynical enough to believe that world events and the actions of others have forced Wisden to drag itself into the modern world — there is being proactive and there is being reactive and I feel Wisden has been and still is the latter.

Jim Cunningham

A book about cricket, with all the scores from all the matches, player information, records, reflections on the season — thats why I buy it every year. I do not buy it to read one side of an argument or the pompous ramblings of someone who seems to believe that good reading and a command of the English language give him the right to pontificate.

Alex Greene

I fear that Wisden is trying to everything to everyone and it is losing its core focus — to report on cricket matches.

Will Cresswell

It is still a joy! I used to like it more with less articles and when the overseas sections contained more detail, but at 86 I can be forgiven for wanting things my way.

Keith Birchall

The Ashes section was brutally honest and quite rightly so. The few pages taken up by The Hundred were also a wonderful subtle message to its creators

— your competition isn't that important, so we will give it the exposure it deserves.

Rob Jones

I noted that Wisden finally accepted the career details of WG Grace as originally formulated by the Association of Cricket Statisticians. I am not sure whether I agree or disagree with this amendment, but I hope that if in 5, 10 or 20 years the words or actions of someone shouting out against abuse, racism or any other form of discrimination are found to have been ill-judged, clouded, wrong or dis-honest, then Wisden will do likewise. I do not for one second think that those who have spoken out are in any way whatsoever wrong to do so - I just pose the question, 'What if?'

Scott Welsh

To put together Wisden each year must be an enormous task. I love the detail, I devour the match reports and the scorecards from Tests and matches that I did not see or have forgotten about.

So, rather than the headline-grabbers who will pick at anything, let us focus on how much the almanack contains. It caters for so many different aspects of cricket, it respects and honours both the men and women players and competitions and it addresses the issues in our game. If those issues are also issues facing society as a whole, do not criticise Wisden for looking at them through cricketing eyes.

I read the article in the Telegraph which in all sense and purpose was a criticism of the 2022 edition and imagined the older 'chaps' in the pavilion nodding furiously as they read it, with their old 'chums' also nodding as each word was read aloud.

Wisden and the Editor should not be criticised for its content especially when there are factions within the media who still think racism, homophobic abuse and snobbery are just 'banter.'

Division is actively encouraged by politicians and the media, please do not let it cloud our joy of Wisden.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and I am sorry to the many of you that I did not quote.

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The Virtual Wisdener is the publication of the Wisden Collectors' Club

Which of the following did you read in your 2022 Wisden and which did you enjoy?

Article/Section	Read	Enjoyed	%
The Ashes 2021-22	680	520	76%
Your County/State section	920	660	71%
Notes by the Editor	962	891	93%
Afghanistan and the Taliban	319	158	49%
Cricket's Racism Scandal	717	346	48%
MCC Cowdrey Lecture - S. Fry	639	341	53%
England's Rebel Tours	602	428	71%
John Woodcock	794	725	91%
Obituaries	852	801	94%
Wisden Aligns with the ACS	338	144	43%
The Review of The Hundred	106	31	29%
Leading Cricketer World	644	425	66%
Azeem Rafiq v Yorkshire	592	237	40%
The Pitch Debate	569	343	60%
Women's Cricket During the War	215	170	79%
Cricketana	163	56	34%
How To Measure A Captain	521	385	74%
Five Cricketers of the Year	839	542	65%
Leading Woman Cricketer World	171	53	31%
Wisden Writing Competition	156	62	40%
Men's T20 World Cup	216	29	13%
England - International Cricket	509	344	68%
Overseas Cricket	212	75	35%

Wisden 2022 Survey Results

Did you agree with the choice of the Five Cricketers of the Year

Jasprit Bumrah	942
Devon Conway	883
Ollie Robinson	327
Rohit Sharma	855
Dane van Niekerk	310

A Massive thank you to everyone who took part in the survey I sent out on the 2022 Wisden. I appreciate that simply asking if you read it and liked it is not a MORI Poll, but it does give some indication on what Wisden readers liked. I apologise for abbreviating some article titles in the information above.

In total 1216 individual readers responded. I have pleasure in giving readers the full survey results.

Some readers did not answer all the questions

County Championship Competition 2 Results

I thought I had made the last County Championship Competition a little easier and going by the scores, it was a lot closer than the first one. The maximum possible score was 82 and of the 292 entries 211 were only separated by only 21 points.

Congratulations to one of our newest Wisdener readers, Mark Worthington from Sydney who scored 72 points and won the first prize of a £100 High Street voucher - Mark has asked me to donate £100 worth of food to a local Food Bank - done and thank you!

Second Prize:

Arthur Dobson with 72 points

Debbie Young with 72 points

Each received a £50 M&S Voucher

Third prize:

Kieran Hobson with 69 points

Richard Holt with 68 points

Liz Smith with 68 points

Each received a magazine subscription of their choice.

Just missed out -

Drew Tomas with 67 points

Graham Forbes with 65 points

Sally Davies with 65 points

Adam Grower with 65 points

Phillip Barrett with 64 points

Stephen Gardner with 63 points

Dave Fielding with 62 points

Angela Brassey with 62 points

England v New Zealand Test Competition

England and New Zealand are due to play three Test matches in June and I thought it might be a good idea to have a little Competition to run across all three Tests.

1) How many centuries will be scored across all three Tests. You do not need to break down a figure for each team and if a player scores a double century or a triple century it counts as one century. *(One point for each correct number, a bonus of 5 if spot on, none if you go over the actual figure)*

2) How many bowlers across all three Tests will take 12 wickets or more. You do not need to break down a figure for each team. *(One point for each correct number, a bonus of 5 if spot on, none if you go over the actual figure)*

3) Place in order with HIGHEST FIRST and Lowest Last the players from the following list who will score the most runs across all three Tests

Joe Root

Kane Williamson

Devon Conway

Ben Stokes

Tom Latham

Zak Crawley

(For each player in the correct position, one point, if all are correct a bonus of 5)

4) Place in order with the LOWEST FIRST and the Highest last the players who will score the LEAST runs across all three Tests

Tom Blunder

Gary Bairstowe

Colin de Grandhomme

Ollie Pope

(For each player in the correct position, one point, if all are correct a bonus of 5)

5) How many batsmen will be CLEAN BOWLED across all three Tests.

You do not need to break down a figure for each team.

6) Across all the three Tests how many ducks (out and not, not out) will there be?

(For questions 5 and 6 - One point for each correct number, a bonus of 5 if spot on, none if you go over the actual figure.)

All answers to be with me by 10am on THURSDAY, JUNE 2.

Please send to furmedgefamly@btinternet.com or by post to the address on Page 14

First Prize: = £150 High Street Voucher

Second Prize x 2 = £75 High Street Voucher

Third Prize x 3 = £25 High Street Voucher