

Back in 2018 in *The Wisdener* I sarcastically wrote about a new cricket competition called *The Wisdener Cup*, a 'one ball' per side tournament intent on creating as much time around the match for beer-drinking and 'fun.' Well, coming out of the Caribbean this week was the announcement that a 60-ball competition called, wait for it, *The Sixty* is being organised by Cricket West Indies (CWI) and the Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

May I suggest you click [HERE](#) and you have a read about this revolutionary, never seen before, ultimate, unique, mind-blowing concept and then after reading it, substitute every positive word in the article with the word 'cash' because all it is, is a ridiculous bastardisation of the game in the pursuit of money. Here are just a few of the 'mind-blowing' innovations that the new competition has come up with:

*Each batting team has six wickets — at the fall of the sixth the team is all out.

*There will be 30 balls bowled from one end before the action switches to the other end for the final 30 balls.

*The 30 balls will be delivered as five separate overs, with no bowler being able to bowl more than two overs for the innings.

*Fans will vote for the timing of a 'mystery free hit' where a batter can't be dismissed by the bowler.

*Each batting side has two power play overs. They can unlock a third power play by hitting two sixes in the first twelve balls.

Maybe I am being cynical but what possible good can be gained by such a competition? If fans are asked to attend a match, what will they be charged for 20 overs of cricket? How will fans be able to choose when the 'mystery free hit' takes place and will that vote be done using mobile phone technology? Isn't that open to betting fraud?

The CWI president Ricky Skerritt said, "I am really excited about the innovation, excitement and entertainment." It seems to me Mr Skerritt that you might be someone who is easily excitable.

I know that West Indies cricket is struggling but is this the way forward? Will other countries follow suit? I have long since argued that if attending Test cricket in places like the West Indies was made free to the public then the grounds could recoup lost revenue (which is paltry anyway) by charging catering franchises slightly more - as having more spectators would mean they would be in a position to increase

takings.

Whilst on the subject of change it seems that the rumours coming out in regard to Andrew Strauss's 'High performance' Review seem to suggest fewer county matches, playing some matches overseas and possibly reducing the number of counties. The panel consists of two men who are a little controversial to say the least - Sir Dave Brailsford and Dan Ashworth.

Once again the 'Panel' will come up with ideas and if the counties are invited to offer their thoughts, how many counties will go to their membership to ask for their thoughts??? What gives Strauss and the panel the right to change our game, I did not vote for them, did you?

Over the years English cricket has been associated with some 'characters' - Stanford was one, but without casting aspersions on anyone involved in any restructuring of our game — have a little look at some of the opinions given on the make up of the panel and take a little look at Brailsford and Ashworth.

The ECB has been attacked by Yorkshire's past four chairman denouncing its handling of the club's racism scandal and demanding an independent enquiry into the whole affair, and there is also a growing feeling that the handling of Durham CCC's 'destruction' and the part an ex-Yorkshire chairman played in it should also be investigated.

It seems that the days of Arlott and Jonners, Swanton and Cardus are long gone. Cricket is facing controversy at every turn, thank goodness for the breath of fresh air that has swept into the England dressing room with McCullum and Stokes. It might be brief respite from the awful performances and lack of adventure of the previous few years but let us enjoy it while it lasts.

Apparently attendances for The Blast are down on 2019 and down on expectations, the phrase 'I told you so' comes to mind. The schedule is fragmented, it is also ridiculous to expect people to be able to afford to go to nine matches in a two-month period. There is a cost of living crisis and cricket as always seems tithing it is immune.

There is still so much to look forward to this season, but there is a sense that there is change afoot and it would be both sad and disheartening if the real cricket fans, the 150,000+ county members, club members and society members and supporters are not properly and independently consulted.

Bill

South Africa v England, Durban 1948

The definition of an exciting finish to a Test might be when all the players forget to snatch some souvenir stumps as they race off the field in excitement or dismay. On that basis, the Durban Test of England's 1948/9 tour ranks high as one of the greatest finishes in Test history. England clinched victory off the last ball of the game, and as the players raced away from the steady drizzle and crepuscular gloom the two sets of stumps remained unchallenged.

The main focus of attention had switched to Cliff Gladwin's thigh. As human limbs go, it ranked fairly low in the aesthetic league, but it had brought England their precious victory. The brawny, bluff fast bowler from Chesterfield's mining community had taken the last ball on the thigh and hared up the other end as if his very life depended on it. His partner, Alec Bedser, managed to get in at the danger end, while Gladwin waved his bat exultantly. In the pandemonium of the dressing-room Gladwin posed for photographs of the most famous thigh in cricket and expressed the fond hope that the eventual bruise would never fade.

At the start of that final over, one of four results was possible. England needed eight to win, South Africa wanted two more wickets, and a tie or a draw was perfectly possible. The light was fearful and the nearby hills were totally hidden by the heavy rain. We were down to human elements like courage, nerve and luck, with technical skill almost irrelevant. Lindsay Tuckett, the bowler, could not grip the ball properly in such damp conditions, and neither the fielders nor the batsmen could sight the ball satisfactorily. If 'Dickie' Bird had been umpiring, they would have been off the field two hours ago, but mercifully both sets of players wanted victory above all. It was that kind of match throughout.

Unusually for South Africa, poor weather dogged all four days of the Test. Yet the resultant erratic nature of the pitch and the encouragement it gave to the bowlers kept the game open — in stark contrast to England's last visit to Durban, the infamous Timeless Test of the 1938/9 tour. This time runs had to be earned, and the three half-centuries made were worth at least a hundred in less hazardous circumstances.

George Mann, leading England in his first Test, lost the toss, but fine bowling by Gladwin and Bedser in a humid atmosphere, backed up by brilliant fielding, restricted South Africa to a disappointing score. There was time for just seven balls and one run to England before bad light and rain ended play for the day. Next day only three hours' play was possible, and England reached 144 for 2, with Hutton 81 not out and Compton on 17. The off-spin of Rowan and the slow left arm of 'Tufty' Mann restricted the batsmen, and they were beginning to turn the ball when a

With South Africa arriving later in the summer, I thought a look back at one of the closest Tests ever played between the countries might be of interest. The First Test of a five-match series was played at Kingsmead, Durban on the 16, 17, 18 and 20 December 1948.

thunderstorm ended proceedings. With just two days left, it was hard to see how either side could win, especially with the weather so uncertain.

At dawn on the third morning, George Mann (Pictured, Below) went to the ground and took a decision which altered the course of the match. The groundsman told him that the longer he delayed rolling the pitch, the more difficult it would be for batting. Seven minutes of rolling were allowed and the groundsman said it would crack and crumble on the baked surface if he waited. Mann agreed and so conditions became even more



difficult for batting. On the third day, twelve wickets fell for 199 and there now seemed every prospect of a definite result. Compton's 72 on a broken wicket was a classic, a signpost to his genius. His footwork against the spinners was bewitching and, if he had got out cheaply, England would have lost the game. Instead he guided them to a lead of 92, and at the close South Africa had lost four men for 90. The initiative lay with England, provided the weather held.

One of the greatest days in Test history started favourably for the home side. Billy Wade and Denis Begbie added 85 in eighty-two minutes, and Begbie even hit Bedser for six, a genuine collector's item. Mann switched his bowlers around in desperation and finally he caught Begbie off Bedser and Jenkins bowled Wade round his legs. Rowan and Tuckett lingered for a time, but soon after half past three, South Africa were all out for 219. That left England a possible 135 minutes in which to get 128.

England's intentions were clear off the first ball, which was cut fiercely by Hutton to gully, where Dudley Nourse took it on the knee and went down like a sack of potatoes. He needed five minutes of medical attention, which did nothing at all for the scoring rate. Then Washbrook swung at his first ball and was dropped on the long leg boundary by Wynne. Rain fell shortly afterwards, lopping off another ten minutes, and when Hutton was taken at silly mid-on, it seemed as if England would never manage to accelerate in deteriorating conditions. The captain ran out to the wicket at 25 for 1, and he and Washbrook added a swift 24 before Washbrook was lbw. Mann was hitting

out at everything by now and he was dropped twice in the gathering gloom. Finally his luck ran out and Mitchell took a brilliant slip catch: 52 for 3.

The drizzle was now persistent and both bowlers and batsmen were hampered. Cuan McCarthy (Pictured, Below) a strapping nineteen-year-old was a fearsome proposition in the murky light and he fired out Watkins, Simpson and Evans to reduce England to 70 for 6. One hour to go, 56 needed and four wickets in hand.

'Roley' Jenkins ambled out to join Compton, surely



England's last hope. Compton asked 'Roley' if he was worried about fast bowling and he answered in his usual cheerful way, 'Don't worry about me, mate - I'll prop and cop for you.' He was as good as his word and they stole singles here and there as the tension rose.

The England players had locked themselves in their dressing-room, and those who could not bear to watch paced up and down. With half an hour left, England needed another 33. At 115 for 6, with just thirteen needed, Compton was bowled after again demonstrating his character and nerve. One run later, Jenkins was given out caught at the wicket, after aiming a swat at a short ball after it had passed him — a decision that still annoys the genial 'Roley' almost forty years later. So with ten minutes left, England had come a long way — but they still needed another twelve.

Alec Bedser (Pictured, right) - brave, sensible and no mug with the bat - was already out there and he was joined by a grinning giant called Cliff Gladwin. In retrospect, Gladwin was the ideal man for the situation. When you hail from a mining community, where tragedy can stalk hand-in-hand with poverty, you tend to be able to put sporting matters in perspective. Gladwin looked as if he was actually enjoying all the tension as he came to the crease. He passed Dudley Nourse, the opposition captain, who inquired testily, 'What have you got to smile about?' and back came the classic reply, 'Coometh the hour, coometh the man!' How right he was...

Gladwin nearly botched it up, though. He lifted one ball to Tuckett at mid-on, but he missed it in the gloom and they ran two. Then Bedser was almost run out as they stole a hair-raising single. The senior partner was



left to face the last over with eight needed. It was to be bowled by Lindsay Tuckett, a fastish, reliable bowler with the reputation of bowling straight. In the misty drizzle that could be enough to win the game. Bedser heaved at the first ball, missed and they ran a leg-bye. Seven needed in seven balls. Gladwin took the next one on the rise and planted it in the direction of deep midwicket — a genuine tailenders slog. Eric Rowan was out there for the catch, but he had come in too far and the ball sailed over his clutching fingers, bounced once and rolled over the boundary. A four: three needed in six. They got another leg-bye down to long leg off the third ball. Five balls in which to get two runs — surely it was England's game? Tuckett dried the ball on a towel while Bedser bent down to touch his toes, for something to do amid the tension. Off the fourth ball, Bedser drove hard to mid-off where Nourse made a great stop and dared the batsmen to run. They did not. Bedser swung at the fifth ball and it hit him in the stomach; the crowd roared a frantic appeal, even though the ball was passing a foot over the stumps. Three balls to go, two to win. Bedser stabbed the next delivery to cover for a single to bring the scores level. Now it was all up to Gladwin.

Before the seventh ball, Bedser called up to the wicket to tell his partner that Billy Wade, the wicket-keeper, was standing well back in case of byes or an awkward bounce. Bedser said, 'If you miss it, run like mad, because I'll already be on my way.' Gladwin missed it, but forgot to run. Bedser did not and he was sent back with an anguished scream by Gladwin. The giant Bedser managed to cram on the brakes and get back. He then noticed that Wade was in such a nervous state that he had not picked up the ball cleanly and that they could have got the vital single. They would have to go for it next time, wherever the ball was to land.

Tuckett bowled the last ball of the match, with a draw or England win imminent. It was a perfectly good delivery, around leg-stump and short of a length. It smacked against Gladwin's thigh as Bedser charged forward, bellowing, 'Run! Run!' The ball came out to 'Tufty' Mann at short leg and while he fumbled for it, Bedser dived forward to safety. He came up under a pile of bodies and looked up to see Gladwin waving his bat around at the other end. Only then did Bedser know England had won, courtesy of a solid lump of Derbyshire thigh.

The South Africans sat stunned for five minutes in their dressing room, letting the impact of the struggle sink in. There would be time enough for post-mortems, and within five minutes they were offering their generous congratulations to England. It was hard on Cuan McCarthy, who had bowled at full speed for an hour and half in daunting circumstances, while still finishing on the losing side after taking six

Yet England had played the more positive cricket throughout, and the way they approached the run chase spoke volumes for the attitude of the players and their positive captain.

Without the injury to Nourse and the stoppage for rain, England would have had another fifteen minutes in hand. If Compton had got out early during his crucial partnership with Jenkins, South Africa would have won. If Eric Rowan had obeyed the old maxim of standing with his heels on the boundary rope he would have caught Gladwin's desperate smear. If anybody but 'Tufty' Mann had been placed at short leg in the final over, there would have been a run-out: Mann's spectacles were covered by the driving rain and he could not sight the ball instantly when Gladwin produced the final leg-bye. By the time Mann had gathered the ball, Bedser had lumbered past him.

It is fair to say that George Mann's captaincy was more

subtle and inspiring than that of Dudley Nourse and Mann's dawn visit to the ground on the third day was highly influential.

Patrick Murphy

First Test:

South Africa

161 (Nourse, 37. Begbie, 37. Bedser, 4-39) and

219 (Wade, 63. Begbie, 48. Wright, 4-72).

England

253 (Hutton, 83. Compton, 72. NBF Mann, 6-59. Rowan, 4-108)

and

128-8 (Compton, 28. McCarthy, 6-43).

England won by two wickets.

John Woodcock (1926 - 2021)

Pakistan in England: Coming of Age - Wisden 1983.

The Pakistanis, paying their seventh visit to England, were a strong and experienced side, led for the first time by Imran Khan. England, who did well to beat them, were helped by an unsteadiness of temperament which tended at vital moments to be Pakistan's undoing. In terms of pure cricketing ability, Pakistan, man for man, were at least as good a side.

From the start, it was clear that Pakistan could expect a lot of rowdily vocal, expatriate support. This added to the somewhat disputatious nature of an exciting Test series. The days have long gone when Pakistan came meekly to the slaughter.

Imran is one of the world's outstanding all-rounders. He led a fine, if volatile, batting side, and in Abdul Nadir he had the best leg-spinner in the game.

Imran was the commanding figure of the tour. If he had a failing, other than picking out the umpires for criticism, it was in trying to do too much of the Test bowling himself. Being so much the most dangerous of the faster bowlers, the temptation was obvious. He led from the front, never sparing himself in any of his bowling spells, batting with more application than those higher in the order, and handling his side with authority.

Michael Henderson on John Woodcock

(Woodcock was...) A self-contained man, who considered emotional excess to be unmanly, Woodcock was never a dry stick. Towards the end of his time as the *Times's* essayist emeritus, he told readers that if the England players who had thrown jelly beans on to the pitch at Trent Bridge in 2007 to distract the Indian batsmen insisted on behaving like infants, they should play the next Test match in short pants.

Why, he wondered on another occasion, did an England bowler wear a wrist watch? The Grand Stand clock told the time all day long. In his final days he could never understand why Jofra Archer, the current England fast bowler, wore enough gold round his neck to service the economy of a Caribbean Island.

One day at Lord's, David Green, an expansive opening batsman for Lancashire and Gloucestershire who had joined the ranks of reporters, wheezed into the press box after a night of continuous libation to see that Middlesex required two wickets for victory. "Knock his poles out," he panted in the direction of the bowling team, "so we can all fuck off home". "Ah yes," said Wooders, "as dear old Jim used to say!"

Woodcock liked Green, and not only because "Greeny" was an Oxford man. He was tolerant of human frailty, and disposed to forgiveness, as the Gospels encourage us all to be. Those he cared little for, he would "let go outside off stump". An absolute rotter might be called "only quite a nice chap". Gentle in manner, he was modest in speech. Humankind has not yet reached such a state of perfection that we can afford to ignore such qualities.

Robert James Crisp (Pictured, Below) was one of the most extraordinary men ever to play Test cricket. His cricket, which is only a fraction of the story, was explosive enough: he is the only bowler to have taken four wickets in four balls twice. Born in Calcutta, he was educated in Rhodesia and once took nine for 64 for Western Province against Natal in



1933-34.

But it is astonishing that he ever found a moment for such a time-consuming game as cricket.

He was essentially an adventurer — he had just climbed Kilimanjaro when he got news that he was wanted for the 1935 tour — with something of an attention span problem. Like other such characters, his defining moment came in the Second World War

when he was an outstanding but turbulent tank commander, fighting his own personal war against better-armoured Germans in Greece and North Africa. He had six tanks blasted from under him in a month but carried on fighting and was awarded the DSO for outstanding ability and great gallantry.

However, he annoyed authority so much that General Montgomery intervened personally and prevented him being given a Bar a year later; his second honour was downgraded to an MC. Crisp was Mentioned in Dispatches four times before being invalided out in Normandy. The king asked if his bowling would be affected. "No, sire," he is alleged to have replied. "I was hit in the head."

Crisp never did play again and found that the tedium of peacetime presented him with a problem far harder than anything offered by the Germans. He suddenly left and lived in a Greek hut for a year. Told he had incurable cancer, he spent a year walking round Crete, selling accounts to the Sunday Express. He died with a copy of the Sporting Life on his lap, reportedly having just lost a £20 bet, a risk-taker to the last. Crisp's 276 career wickets came at an average of only 19.88, but statistics are absurd for such a man.

Former England fast-bowler Harold Larwood commented after receiving a call from Prime Minister John Major, "If I'd known he was planning to throw 30,000 blokes out of the pits, I'd given him a right ear-bashing"

When the heinous crimes of Colonel Sebastian Moran are revealed in the Sherlock Holmes drama, "Terror by Night" (Universal Studios, 1946), Dr Watson expostulates: "But he played for the Gentlemen at Lord's!"

"I don't really enjoy Test cricket that much." (Chris Tavare, after making 35 runs in five an a half hours in Madras.)

In November 1990 the Yorkshire committee, primarily responding to the emergence of the Lancashire fast bowler (but Yorkshire-born) Peter Martin, decided to allow players born outside the county to play for Yorkshire. Fred Trueman raged, "It's a bloody disgrace. Anybody who was not born in this great county should not be allowed to take the field for Yorkshire. When I was playing we beat everybody in sight and there's no reason why we can't do it again. All we need to do is get rid of half of the committee and replace them with people who actually know something about cricket."

1896: Mr W. G. Grace and the Surrey Club

Various rumours having gained currency as to the amount of money allowed to Mr Grace for expenses when playing for England at The Oval, the following official statement was made public on August 10 - the opening day of the third Test match:

"The committee of the Surrey County Cricket Club have observed paragraphs in the Press respecting amounts alleged to be paid, or promised to, Dr W.G.Grace for playing in the match England v Australia.

The committee desire to give the statements contained in the paragraphs the most unqualified contradiction. During many years, on the occasion of Dr W.G.Grace playing at The Oval, at the request of the Surrey County Committee, in the matches Gentlemen v Players and England v Australia, Dr Grace has received the sum of £10 a match to cover his expenses in coming to and remaining in London during the three days. Beyond this amount Dr Grace has not received, directly or indirectly, one farthing for playing in a match at The Oval."

Signed on behalf of the Committee,
C.W.Alcock August 10, 1896,

W.G.Grace scored 170 for England in the third Test match mentioned above.

(£10 in 1896 would be the equivalent in 2022 of around £1500).

Philip Clive Roderick Tufnell. Now there's a name, one you'd associate with a Lloyds Syndicate member perhaps, a cricketer maybe; if so a gentleman, certainly not a player.

However, names can be deceiving. As most of you know, P. C. R. Tufnell's reputation goes before him. In an age when people say there aren't any characters in cricket, here we have one. His life to date has certainly been interesting: a lot of highs and lows and a fair bit of controversy. Philip is one of those people who always get caught. He even looks guilty when he hasn't done anything.

'Tuffers' early years as a cricketer were spent at Highgate School, opening the batting and bowling left-arm seam. I'm sure, looking back, he will feel that he eventually chose the right skill to specialise in. Bowling quick is too much like hard work, although the financial rewards of being a batsman might seem particularly lucrative to him!

I think Philip began to lose interest in his batting when bowlers began getting the ball above hip height. He'd be the first to admit that he doesn't really fancy the quick stuff, though to be honest, not many of us do. When batting with him, you tend to face more of Allan Donald, Waqar Younis, etc than he does.

Philip, though, can actually bat quite well when he puts his mind to it, and is a lot better player than most people think, on his day striking the ball as well as anybody in the Middlesex side. Despite his running between the wickets Tuffers is an amusing, entertaining (when I first met him he had two house stereo speakers in the back of his car bellowing out Dead or Alive, or Divine) but sometimes stropky member of the Middlesex side.

He has benefited enormously through playing under both Mike Catting and John Emburey. Gatt has been a constant weight on his shoulders for the right reasons, trying to get him right off the field. Embers has been his main foil on the field, helping him with field placements and the way he should bowl. Both must take a lot of credit for Phil going on the Australia tour and also in getting his England place back this summer.

They have had more than a few heated moments. Embers, when captaining the Middlesex side against Glamorgan, asked Tuffers what field he would like.

When you next listen to Phil Tufnell on the radio, recall the time when he was seen as the best left-arm spinner around and a long and distinguished Test career was ahead of him. Back in 1990 Angus Fraser wrote the following article on his promising team mate.

Tuffers' reply after he had been hit around a bit was: 'You've got the three lions on your chest, you set the field.' As you might expect, this got Embers' back up a bit, and the next hour or so was quite entertaining for the rest of us! I wonder what Tuffers would say now that the roles are reversed.

By taking 65 wickets for Middlesex in 1990 he was one of the main contributors to our Championship victory, and stood out as the obvious choice for the left-arm spinner's slot in

Australia. As history shows, it was not one of the most successful tours, but despite all the other things that happened out there he came back with a reputation as a good international bowler, nearly bowling England to victory in only his second Test, at Sydney. He became almost a cult figure in Australia



very quickly — someone they either loved or hated. This, for me, reached a high at the MCG in our last one-day game against Australia, a match we had to win. We were struggling (for a change), nine down, 50 to win, when Tuffers made his way towards the wicket. Sixty-thousand people started singing Tufnell is a w*****! I couldn't believe it. How could one man attract so much attention in such a short space of time? This fragile figure, feet ten-to-two, walked towards me with this tremendous din going on around us. When he arrived at the wicket we both burst out laughing.

He was recognised more than most wherever we went, which is good if you don't want to queue, and get the odd free beer, but bad in that everything you do both on and off the field is closely monitored. This, I think, is where Philip has run into problems. He feels that people should only be interested in what happens on the field. What he does and how he behaves off it is his business!

I think and hope he has learnt that this is not the case. There are plenty of people out there ready to stuff you if they get half the chance. You have to be on your guard at all times.

On the field I for one like Tuffers' approach. He is aggressive (maybe too much at times), competitive, and makes sure that every ball counts. Too many cricketers play in an easy manner, and if they fail it's a case of 'don't worry, there's always the next game'. Philip isn't like that. Every time he goes out he wants to get five wickets. Even during the Oval Test, after getting six wickets in the first West Indies innings, you could see how important it was for him to get Hooper out in the second innings after being hit around by him earlier.

Tuffers is by no means an angel, and sometimes does get a bit too involved in a decision. But the image he has means that more is made of it than would if it happened to another player.

The apparent incident with an umpire on his debut in Melbourne got him off to a bad start, but there was a lot more behind that than met the eye. The competitive attitude might get him into more trouble, but it also makes him the bowler that he is. Take it away and you only have half the bowler.

All in all, Tuffers is the best spin bowler in the country. If he keeps his slate clean he should be a regular in the England side until the year 2000. I know I'd rather play with him than against him, as would most batsmen in the country. I only hope that I have the opportunity to play more Test matches with him in the near future.

Mark Waugh theorised that *"if you attack him, he can go on the defensive, and it puts him off his game"*, [although Waugh was Tufnell's most frequent test victim, being dismissed a total of seven times by him, three of them bowled.

According to Writer and journalist Sir Michael Parkinson, *"At the age of nine he was opening the bowling and the batting for his club's junior team"*. Parkinson also believes that his *"ordinary fielding made him a luxury in the view of the ... (English cricket) management (circa August 1996)"*.

According to Simon Hughes, *'Tufnell was not at all an accomplished or confident batsman, often appearing particularly nervous and awkward at Test level, where he became regarded as the ultimate 'rabbit' number 11, Tufnell's fielding improved during his career.'* He was nicknamed "The Cat" due to his propensity to be found sleeping in the corner of dressing room. He also acquired the nickname "Two Sugars" due to his well-known love of tea. According to England teammate Mike Atherton, Tufnell smoked very heavily.

The next Wisden Collectors' Club Auction will begin in mid-July — it will be the biggest auction ever, with the highest number of lots and some exceptionally rare editions, including an 1874, hardbacks for 1896, 1899, 1916 and 1919 and It will also include a run of distraught and well-read editions from a collector I first sold a book to back in 2004, who sadly passed away recently. All proceeds from his run of editions will be donated to charity.

The only way to bid in any WCC auction is to be a full WCC member and your membership also includes the following benefits

25% OFF all Wisdens - so when there is no sale running you will still get 25% off*

Opportunity to buy or take freely books from the Latest Offers and Giveaways section on this website.

Opportunity to take part in all WCC Auctions.

Each years' new almanack at a greatly reduced cost.

Competitions with proper prizes.

Offers on publications and magazines.

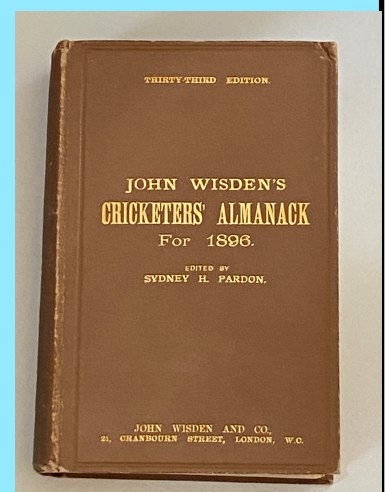
A free collection valuation — this can also be on an ongoing basis.

*The 25% discount is available when no other sale or promotion is running on Wisdenworld and it excludes the 2020, 2021, 2022 Wisdens, Wisdenworld Gift Vouchers and Dust Jackets.

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Thank you



Garfield Sobers, the finest all-round cricketer of today, won't reach his twenty-sixth birthday until July 28. Yet already he is approaching his forty-third Test match, and already has amassed 3,776 runs in these International games, average 60.60, more runs than ever came the way, in Test matches, of Victor Trumper, George Headley, J. T. Tyldesley and other immortals born before Test matches took place nearly every month of the year somewhere or other.

But Sobers doesn't need the scoreboard to tell us of the value of his arts; in fact, the score-board will tell you next to nothing of them. He is truly an artist, lovely and supple to the eye as a batsman and, as a bowler, fascinating to watch and mentally ponder, as he spins the ball, back of the hand, 'googlies' and all. He can even open the attack and use the seam. Back-of-the-hand spinners seldom have the time or the muscular plasticity to study batsmanship as well. The turn of the wrist, with prehensile fingers, is a life-long practice and speculation in itself.

Sobers shares with South African Aubrey Faulkner the distinction of great and prolific batsmanship combined with deadly leg-spin and 'googly'. (Faulkner bowled right-handed and batted left; Sobers is left-handed with bat and ball.)

Sobers is a sign of the growth and development of West Indies cricket since 1928 when, for the first time, the West Indies were admitted to Test match company. The great pioneer of West Indies cricket was George Challenor, who was the Jack Hobbs of Caribbean cricket. His rational batsmanship acted as a guide and corrective to the impulsive, almost purely instinctive, way the game was mainly played by West Indians.

Constantine (now Sir Learie), was in those early burgeoning days the West Indian cricket in apotheosis and in fulfilment. He bowled as fast as nerve, muscle, sinew and endeavour in him allowed; and his idea of a cricket ball, as he waited for it bat in hand, was of an object to be removed forcibly and at once, and far into the distance. Every West Indies boy wants to

He is truly an artist, lovely and supple to the eye as a batsman and, as a bowler, fascinating to watch, and mentally ponder, as he spins the ball, back of the hand, 'googlies' and all. He can even open the attack and use the seam. Back-of-the-hand spinners seldom have the time or the muscular plasticity to study batsmanship as well. The turn of the wrist, with prehensile fingers, is a life-long practice and speculation in itself. - Neville Cardus in his article on Garfield Sobers. It was first published in April 1963.



bowl fast and to use a bat brilliantly and prosperously. It has taken years to sophisticate West Indies cricket, to put natural but unpredictable gifts under some

discipline of mind and judgment. Sobers has achieved the balance of instinct and calculation.

Given the necessary situation and challenge, he has few superiors as a rapid, versatile and fluent stroke-player. But, like nearly every other Test match cricketer of this present economic

period, he has occasionally succumbed to the temptation to 'cash-in' on a slow easy wicket. Then he has actually caused yawns in crowds not stupified by statistics and records.

The fact is that he can play a long innings, with no small power of defence. No batsman could sustain Sobers's immense appetite for runs if he were just a brilliant stroke player and nothing else. He has been likened to Frank Woolley.

To say the truth, he carries himself with a gangling sort of movement which is not at all graceful to the eye—until the ball is on him and he is in actual position to cope with it. Then he becomes all curves, lissome yet concentrated. He is very strong on the back foot, which he uses as a bastion from which he forces to the off, with power and velocity, a length that is merely a shade short.

His record in Test matches to date, as far as averages go, has been surpassed only by Bradman (99.94), Sutcliffe (60.73), Headley (60.83), with Paynter running him closely (59.23). Against Pakistan at Kingston in 1958, he overhauled Hutton's 364 v. Australia by one run in an innings of 365 not out, scored in ten hours eight minutes; Hutton's score was compiled in thirteen hours twenty minutes. And this

365 not out was Sobers's first 'century' in Test matches. At times he has, in Test matches, threatened to approach the prolific consistency of Bradman himself. Consider this astonishing sequence:

1958 v. Pakistan:

52, 52, 80, 365*, 125, 109* (the same match), 14 and 27.

1958-9 v. India:

25, 142*, 4, 198 (run out), 106*, 29, 9 and 44.

1959 v. Pakistan:

0, 14, 29, 45 and 72.

1959-60 v. England:

226, 0, 31, 147, 19 (run out), 145, 92 and 49*.

1960-61 v. Australia:

132, 14, 9, 0, 168, 1, 1, 20, 64 and 21.

He had not found anything like complete mastery when he first played against England, in this country, in 1957. In this rubber his scores were modest enough—53, 14, 17, 66, 47, 9, 4, 29 (run out), 39, 42. In that year he celebrated his twenty-first birthday.

Four years later he made tongues to wag in Lancashire where he appeared in league cricket for Radcliffe, and scored 1,008 runs, average 63, and took 144 wickets at 9 • 83 runs each. His recent performances for South Australia have consolidated his position as perhaps the greatest of all living batsmen/bowlers.

West Indies cricket has during the past few years assimilated ideas and methods from England and Australia, drawing them, absorbing them, into their own constitution and way of looking at cricket. It is to be hoped that, unlike Indian cricketers, they do not allow rationalism and canniness to put too severe a curb on native swift-eyed offence and gusto of temperament.

If the approaching summer in this country should be dry and warm week by week, the chances are that the West Indies will repeat their great victory of 1950, when they won the rubber here. But I doubt if they could beat England by playing in the English way. Let Worrell and Sobers (and the rest) remember how near they came to defeating Australia in the wonderful rubber of 1960/61, by trusting to impulses and instincts born and enlivened by sun and the Caribbean way of life. At Brisbane, in December 1960, Sobers dazzled and excited even hardbitten Australian

onlookers, some of them old cricketers who once saw Bradman, McCabe and Kippax in all their glory, by scoring 132 in two hours v. Australia. Jack Fingleton described this innings as 'one of a lifetime'.

Test cricket is now urgently in need of some injection from Sobers and West Indies cricket. A new urge is probably the only means of reviving a recumbent, if not dying, body. Sobers has a duty not only to himself and to the West Indies but to cricket and Test cricket at large.

Does he realise how some of us caught at our breath a month or so ago, when we were told that he might possibly not come to England this year with the West Indies team, because of considerations of filthy lucre? His absence would surely have cast a shadow in the sunniest season day after day. None of us asks for 'bright' cricket. We expect from Sobers no more than the cricket God has given him.

Should the West Indies be hard-pressed, then we shall applaud and admire Sobers beautifully on the defence—as at Lord's in 1957. Then, in a dark hour for his side, Sobers held the advancing England attack at bay four hours, scoring 66, style in chains but lovely to see! But the sure sign of the master-batsman is that, if he chooses, and circumstances approve, he permits no bowler to enslave him.

The hopes and prayers of all cricketers, in this time of Test match disillusionment, are that England's summer of 1963 will be blessed by the sun, and that Sobers will keep faith with West Indies traditions of the game, and also that he will trust to his rare store of genius.

Neville Cardus

The West Indies defeated England 3-1 in the five match Test series in the summer of 1963. Sobers hit 1,333 runs on the tour, including four centuries and he averaged over 40 in the Tests, he also took 82 wickets, 20 of which were in the Tests.

He played his last Test in 1974 against England and in 93 Test matches he scored 8,032 runs, averaging 57.78 and he took 235 wickets, averaging 34.03. He hit 26 Test centuries and achieved 5 wickets in an innings 6 times.

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By Mail: PO Box 288, Buckden, Cambridgeshire PE19 9EP

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

Bat and Trap - the forerunner of Cricket?, by Diana Rait Kerr.

Cricket's ancestry has long been warmly debated and sweeping claims have been made on behalf of one or other of the superfluity of medieval ball games that this one or that was the parent of cricket, even though its resemblance to cricket may not have gone beyond the basic fact that both were played with some sort of a bat and a missile that may not necessarily have been a ball.

'Of course, bat and trap was the forerunner of cricket,' said a distinguished broadcaster recently. This bold utterance referred to the modern game which flourishes today around Canterbury, where it is possible to see it in many a pub garden on a summer's evening. The game is an ancient one— probably older than cricket; but the parent of cricket. . . ? That is, at least, debatable.

Anyone who wants to study in depth the claims of bat and trap (or trap ball as it was more often called) and other ancient pastimes to be cricket's ancestors should beg, borrow or buy a series of pamphlets published at Nottingham between 1923 and 1929, and known collectively as The H.P.T. Pamphlets, from the pen name of their author, Mr P. F. Thomas.

Most of cricket's bogus ancestors are discussed and analysed: club ball, cat and dog, stoolball, stob ball, hand-in-hand-out, tip-cat, knur and spell and trap ball are a few examples. Club ball he takes to have been a generic term for any game played with a club and a ball (cricket inter alia); the others are discarded as having some basic difference from cricket which, he concludes, had an independent growth, collaterally related to some, but not medieval games.

Most of these games were strictly regional and this regional characteristic persists with the three, apart from cricket, which have survived: stoolball (in a form revived by the late Colonel W. W. Grantham which differs from the ancient game) has its headquarters in east Sussex; knur and spell or northern spell is confined, more or less, to the eastern Pennines and trap ball or bat trap, always more popular in the south-east than anywhere else, is now concentrated around Canterbury.

Method of Playing

The method of playing bat and trap has hardly changed since ancient times; whether or not it may justify a

Diana Rait Kerr was a phenomenal individual. In her lifetime she ran the Lord's museum to such an extent that at no time in its history had the contents been so well catalogued and cared for. She was also a prolific writer, co-authoring with Ian Peebles on a number of books and in the 1960s she contributed exceptionally researched essays such as the one included here. She also had time to own two full sets of Wisdens - which I was fortunate to acquire.

Her father Rowan Rait Kerr was MCC Secretary from 1936 to 1952 and at the outbreak of World War Two Diana drove ambulances during the blitz. Her father asked her to sort out the Lord's museum after the war and with such a love of cricket, it was for her the passion of a lifetime.

claim to be cricket's ancestor the reader may judge for himself. Like cricket, the batsman hits the ball away from a mark and the bowler bowls towards the same mark; but unlike cricket (and more like golf) the batsman himself sets the ball in motion towards a target and he does not defend his mark against the bowler, whose role is more like that of a player of bowls than a cricket bowler.

The earliest picture of trap ball is reproduced by Joseph Strutt in his *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, first published in 1801. The picture, from a MS of the late fourteenth century, shows two players:

a batsman, about to strike the ball up out of an elevated trap, and his opponent standing on one side waiting to receive the ball. The bat is short and square-ended, rather like a wooden butter hand; the waist-high trap was, as Strutt remarked, much more convenient than the later grounded trap, in saving the batsman from having to stoop to knock the ball up.

The elevated trap persists in the spell of the North—the trap from which the knur is launched in knur and spell—but it disappeared from trap

ball even before Strutt's day.

Most of the old traps were made of wood in the form of a shoe, with the square toe that was fashionable in the second half of the seventeenth century; the heel, too, was squared off. A spoon-shaped lever ran along the length of the top of the shoe, pivoted at the instep, the 'bowl' end, on which the ball was placed, dropping



A shoe trap, probably late 17th century, property of WE Gower, Canterbury. The ball almost certainly dating back to the 17th century is from the Vice collection.

into a rounded hollow carved out near the heel; the 'bowl' of the 'spoon' was not itself hollowed out.

The weight of the ball when it was placed on the bowl' caused the 'handle', near the toe of the shoe, to rise, and by hitting this sharply with his bat, the striker launched the ball into the air preparatory to making his stroke. The sole of the shoe was often given a heel like a real shoe, which could be pushed firmly into the ground to anchor the trap.

More primitive or makeshift traps were made by digging a round hole in the ground and using the brisket bone of an ox or a flat piece of wood, placed in a slanting position, one half in the hole with the ball on it and the other half protruding as a lever to launch the ball.

Bats for trap ball have varied: The Boy's Own Book (1852) talks of 'the half round bat, now seldom used except by very young persons'. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, trap bats seem to have taken the form of miniature cricket bats, sometimes slightly outmoded; for example, an engraving of 1788 shows a curved bat reminiscent of a cricket bat of about 1740, but in a painting by Henry Thomson exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1808, the young player's straight bat is like a small cricket bat of that date.

The bats used for modern bat and trap have rounded, or at least elliptical, heads about 8 inches long by 5 inches wide, with flat striking faces rather like table tennis bats, but they are solid and heavy, as much as 3/4 inch thick, with handles which may be a foot or more long. The modern trap consists of a rectangular block, 5 inches in section and 18 inches long, with a lever, similar to the spoon lever on the shoe traps, inserted longitudinally along the top. The ball is placed on the front end of the lever and the striker knocks the ball up from the rear. A few inches in front of the block is a hinged flap, 5 inches square, painted white with a black circular 'bull's eye' in the centre; this is the bowler's aiming mark. The ball in use today is made of solid rubber, 2 1/2 inches in diameter, but it is quite possible that early balls were like small cricket balls and, if so, a seventeenth-century leather covered ball in the M. C. C. collection, measuring just under 7 inches in circumference and weighing 2 ounces, may well have been used for the trap ball and not, as has



The above plate from Joseph Strutt's 'The Sports and pastimes of the People of England' 1801.

been supposed, for children's cricket.

The Canterbury version of bat and trap is played between two teams of any number of players that may be decided (currently the league matches are eight-a-side). Unlike cricket, where the game is set in motion by the bowler, the first move is made by the batsman knocking up the ball out of the trap and hitting it away. He may have two trial knock-ups, but if he fails to hit the ball the third time he is out.

The pitch is 21 yards long and 13 feet 6 inches wide; at the bowler's end a pair of 7 feet high posts set at each side of the pitch mark the batsman's goal; a white line drawn across from post to post is the bowling crease.

The batsman must hit the ball between the posts not more than 7 feet in the air. The fielding side must remain behind the bowling crease, but if they can catch the ball before it bounces, keeping one foot grounded behind the crease, the batsman is out; he is also out if he fails to hit the ball between the posts, either because it stops short or if it runs outside the boundary lines before it reaches the posts.

Nowadays it seems to be rare for the batsman to hit the ball into the air, but in Strutt's time and up till, at least, the middle of the last century, a tape was stretched between the posts over which the batsman had to hit the ball. Provided that the batsman's stroke achieves the goal, there is (unlike knur and spell) no virtue in long hitting and, although the score is misleadingly counted in 'runs', there is no actual running by the batsman and he scores nothing for his stroke. Any score in his favour comes from the bowler failing to hit the trap after the ball has reached the goal and been retrieved. In fact, it could be said that the batsman's role is limited to the necessary task of propelling the ball to the bowler's end so that the bowler may have a shot at the trap.

Having been duly provided with the ball, one of the fielding side then bowls it, underhand, in an attempt to knock down the trap—that is, the hinged target. It is a small target, difficult to hit, but if the bowler succeeds, the batsman is out; if he fails, the batsman scores a run and continues his innings, and another bowler tries to hit the trap. The fielding side bowl in strict rotation, the continuity being kept up from one innings their opponents to the next.

The bowler must deliver the ball with one foot behind the bowling crease, but he may choose any angle of delivery he likes, provided he remains between the posts. This is different from the older game, in which the man who fielded the ball bowled it from where he picked it up, or else from where it fell. This would appear to offer some advantage in leaving some initiative with the batsman by encouraging him to place his shots so as to give the bowler an awkward angle from which to aim at the trap. Every time a bowler fails to hit the trap, the batting side scores a run. As in cricket, each batsman has an innings and league matches are decided on the best of two innings out of three (draws ignored). Additional interest is provided by trap money, contributed by each side towards a kitty which goes to the bowler who scores the most traps.

Bat and trap was revived in Kent about 1922 and, largely through the enthusiasm of Mr W. E. Gower, who has worked tirelessly in collecting evidence of the rules and traditions of the game as well as in promoting it, there is now an enthusiastic following for

it. In 1966, thirty-three teams competed in four divisions and five trophies were at stake in the Canterbury and District Bat and Trap League.

The teams represented public houses and sports clubs in and around Canterbury. There are also women's leagues, and they say the ladies take the game more seriously than the men, which is, maybe, why mixed bat and trap is 'out'. On the kind invitation of Mr Gower I recently attended a league semi-final match. In the apple shaded garden of a public house on the outskirts of Canterbury, on an evening in August, it was a pleasant occasion, with the match taking place in a genial and friendly atmosphere; good Kentish ale to slake the thirst of the players and friends and supporters, with the womenfolk much in evidence, to cheer them on and keep the score. A wan sun lit the pitch as play began, but as dusk fell a garland of electric bulbs added an air of festivity to the scene?

Was the game cricket in embryo? Personally, I agree with H. P. T that it was not.

John Woodcock (1926 - 2021)— words from Wisden

Saturation Point - 1981 Wisden

The reason most often given for the decline in interest in the first-class game in Australia is that it has reached the point of saturation. The same applies to football in England. There is too much of it, just as there is now, to my mind, too much Test cricket. Between the middle of July 1979 and the middle of February 1980, a matter of seven months, India played 17 Test matches. A series between them and West Indies due to have taken place in March and April 1980, was cancelled simply because both countries were surfeited with Test cricket. Between December 1974 and September of this year England will have played Australia no fewer than 31 times. This is more than twice the rate at which they met until a few years ago. In 1981 for the first time England, Australia are playing six Test matches. We must be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

The Best Ever? - 1985 Wisden

Such was the success of the West Indies in 1984 that it came to be wondered whether, perhaps, Clive Lloyd's team were the strongest ever to have taken the field. In 1882 three of the greatest contemporary judges - W. G. Grace, A. G. Steel and Alfred Shaw - had no doubt that the Australian side of that year, led by W. L. Murdoch, was the best to have visited England. Twenty years later similar claims were made on behalf of Joe Darling's Australians, as they were for Warwick Armstrong's in 1921 and Sir Donald Bradman's in 1948.

As Lloyd does now, Murdoch, Armstrong and Bradman each had at his disposal the leading fast bowlers of the day. It is this, more than anything, which makes the present West Indians so immensely formidable. Their presence has brought a new and, dare I say it, chilling dimension to the game. Batsmen, however heavily protected, face them at their peril, and, as on the infamous Bodyline tour of 1932-33, that is only partly to the bowlers' and their captain's credit. It should be a cause of real concern to cricket's administrators that the batsman himself has become as much a target for the fast bowlers of the world as the wicket he defends.

Miller and Lindwall, who played the game hard enough, would never have thought of bowling in the same way to Bedser when he acted as nightwatchman at Headingley in 1948; nor, I feel sure, would Gregory and McDonald, or the Deon Spofforth. Perhaps when the International Cricket Conference do no more than pay lip service to the problem, it is not surprising that umpires are so compliant.

The Tea Interval

"Carl Lewis - what a great runner...All his arms and elbows and knees running in the same direction."

Ron Pickering, BBC Sport.

"So, its five 1,000 metre laps, plus a bit to make up the 5,000 metres."

BBC Athletics Commentator.

"I worry about ridiculous things, you know, how does a guy who drives a snowplough get to work in the morning... that can keep me awake for days." –

Billy Connolly

"A man walks into a chemist's and says, 'Can I have a bar of soap, please?'

The chemist says, 'Do you want it scented?'

And the man says, 'No, I'll take it with me now.'" –

Ronnie Barker.

I said to the gym instructor: "Can you teach me to do the splits?", He said: "How flexible are you?",

I said: "I can't make Tuesdays.

Tommy Cooper

A group of chess enthusiasts checked into a hotel for a celebratory

Christmas dinner

and were

standing in the

lobby discussing

their recent

tournament

victories. After

about an hour,

the manager

came out of the

office and asked

them to disperse.

"But why?" they

asked, as they

moved off.

"Because," he

said

"I can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer."

"He is taking me so serious, he is fighting under closed doors."

Lennox Lewis, British Boxer..

A man says to his wife, "Grab your jacket I'm going to the pub."

She asks, "Oh, are you taking me with you?"

"No, I'm turning the heating off."



"The purpose of today's meeting is to look very busy like we're actually accomplishing something."

"Poor old fool," thought the well-dressed gentleman as he watched an old man fish in a puddle outside a pub. So he invited the old man inside for a drink.

As they sipped their whiskeys, the gentleman thought he'd humour the old man and asked, "So how many have you caught today?"

The old man replied, "You're the eighth."

I used to work in a pub next to a hospital and this guy walked in one day with his hospital gown on and holding a drip on a stand that was still connected to his veins.

I asked him how I could help and bizarrely he said, "Can I have 2 pints of lager, 2 pints of Guinness, 4 jack Daniels and coke, 3 gin and tonics, and 6 shots of tequila.

It's a free country so I start to pour the drinks and put them on the bar one at a time. As I finished pouring all of the drinks he downed them in order and finished on the shots of tequila which he dispatched one at a time in a quick pace.

He then looked at me really sad and said, "I shouldn't have drunk all that with what I've got." I said,

"Why what have you got?" He said, "About £3.50."

"He's a very dangerous bowler - innocuous, if you like."

David 'Bumble' Lloyd.



Wisdens and The Pandemic - Part Two

One of the things I did when I began Wisdenworld many years ago was to ask a close friend of mine to put something together in order for me to monitor Wisden prices, prices from everywhere - eBay, other websites, catalogues and auctions. I didn't think it would be possible but he found it a relatively simple bit of software to develop and I have used it ever since. Please don't ask me how it all works on a software/programme type level, I just know that all the data is captured and at my fingertips I can access prices and trends.

Over the years Lorraine and at times Abbey and Libby have spent time inputting information - especially when I receive a catalogue containing Wisdens or the results of auctions from around the world are published and the system is now slick enough that 'condition' can be included. This process can sometimes be labour-intensive but it is worth it. Every Wisden listed on any site is also captured. This helps me write with confidence about how the March 2022 lockdown impacted on the buying and selling of Wisdens.

Wisdens on eBay

I will talk about eBay for a little while simply to give a little perspective, as a dealer the only item I sell on eBay is usually the new edition (ie 20220 as this might bring new customers to me). I do not sell any other Wisdens on that platform but it is the largest online market place in the world in which to buy and sell Wisdens, so its important to mention it.

At the start of the pandemic what became quickly apparent was the number of Wisdens selling on eBay and the rise in prices of very modern editions. By 'very modern' I refer to 1980 to present day. On the day that lockdown began there were 825 Wisdens listed on eBay, which was the lowest daily number in 2020 - probably a coincidence. Of the 825, 614 were Wisdens from 1950 to present day and 109 of the remainder were rebound editions or Willows editions from 1910 - 1959. Of the remainder only 18 were original hardbacks from pre-1950 and the rest were paperbacks or soft backs. There were 5 Wisdens listed from pre-1890.

It has to be said that of the 825 editions listed, 172 were listed by people who I would class as Wisden dealers — whether part-time, under-the-radar or full-time, this is important to point out as this meant that almost 20% of all books listed were from 'dealers.' The majority of these sellers have other careers and for them Wisden selling is a hobby — and that is not meant to be disrespectful. Going back to 2003 the percentage of Wisdens listed by dealers on eBay has generally averaged out at between 15% and 24% of all Wisden listings.

There is so much information that I want to share with you - but I don't want you to get bored or think badly of me for going on, so I will apologise in advance about Part Two of this feature.

My aim is to give an overview of what has happened and why in the Wisden market in the past couple of years - and some of you may be surprised.

I have tried to be as open and honest as I can be.

Please feel free to contact me if anything in particular interests or if you don't like my tone or my views.

It also needs to be pointed out that the majority of people, non-dealers, who list Wisdens on eBay do not tend to include full descriptions, phrases such as 'good for year' or 'good' condition seem to be the norm. This is not in any way a criticism. A seller will have looked at other listings and copied the phrases. Not having the knowledge, the experience or the inclination to fully describe them should not be a criticism of a listing - if any potential buyer wanted to know more then they could always ask. But, even the experienced sellers do not include full descriptions and over the years buyers have tended not to look at eBay.

From 2010 to 2019 an average of 14% of Wisdens sold on eBay in their first listing. In 2019 in particular 32% of all listings recorded on December 1 had been listed since August 1.

Then lockdown started.

Within three weeks of the first lockdown, the number of Wisdens listed on eBay had jumped to over 1400 - maybe people had more time on their hands to list books, dealers too, so the numbers shot up. For the period May 1 to August 1 the average number of Wisdens on eBay daily was 1,682.

The number of Wisdens allocated to 'dealers' throughout the period up to August 1 was 28%. In terms of sales there was a big increase and books of what could only be described as 'average' quality were also selling.

After initially being fearful of what lockdown would bring, sales on Wisdenworld were high — it was also the build up to the release of the 2020 almanack but it is right to point out that there is very little historical correlation between increased sales and a new Wisden coming out.

Away from eBay other websites seemed to see no great surge in sales and some established dealers did not issue any new lists or catalogues — stock on dealer websites seemed to remain stagnant. On a number of occasions the only way to contact other dealers was via email as offices/shops were seemingly closed — which given the incredible uncertainty, staffing levels and government regulations was both understandable and right

As people bought off eBay what became apparent was that the overall quality dropped — it became obvious that those who regularly listed books were listing whatever they had and the alarming thing was that the prices were rising. Poor quality 1980s and 1990s Wisden Hardbacks - ripped dust jackets, even no jackets — were being listed for £25-£40 and selling.

Something not seen before also happened: Usually within three years of the latest Wisden being released the price would start to drop, so on that basis a 2017 Wisden (RRP £50) under normal circumstances would probably be available for around £20-£25 in 2020. Because so many Wisdens were being sold, there quickly became a shortage of even the most recent ones — so the prices of even the modern ones did not and have not fallen.

Finding stock

The first lockdown also meant that acquiring collections was not possible. Smaller sets could be posted to me but nothing large. I had to cancel 24 appointments to view Wisdens between March 22 and July 2, so acquiring stock was difficult.

As the overall quality of Wisdens advertised on auction sites fell, as the lockdown intensified and more and more people came into the market — either re-igniting a dormant collection, adding to an existing one, or starting one — the demand for Wisdens on Wisdenworld was unprecedented.

Thankfully I have never been someone who sees this as a short-term option for me so the amount of Wisdens I hold in stock constantly changes. If I am offered a set of almanacks that I already have 20 editions each of, I understand that someone will want them in the future, this is my full-time occupation so I have to always be looking ahead. It became apparent that as stock levels elsewhere fell, poorer quality Wisdens were listed and at prices which were simply not favourable to buyers.

Initially the surge in orders on online auction sites had a number of knock-on effects. Primarily for many dealers who used such sites this meant that once their limited stock was sold they could not find collections, so as previously mentioned the poorer quality editions they had left were offered, at generally too high a price.

Using online auction sites (although 'auction' should be treated with caution as over 90% of listings are Buy-it-Now) for people coming back into collecting, expanding or starting meant that when orders arrived the difference in quality because there was and is no standard in descriptions, was stark. This realisation coupled with a lack of quality editions (especially pre 1970) had the impact that from August through to November 2020 the number of completed sales across three different main auction sites dropped to only 11%

of Wisdens listed. Again, this is just a number, a percentage and the majority of Wisdens listed on for example eBay are from non-dealers who simply want to sell the Wisdens they have or they have inherited — the same way they would sell clothing or household items they no longer need.

Busiest-ever time

This period was the busiest ever time for Wisdenworld. My fear was that the pandemic would stop collectors from purchasing, but this was not the case. Right across the 150+ years of Wisden, whether original hardbacks, paperbacks or soft backs, Willows or rebinds, the demand was exceptional. But the one thing that came out more than anything was that there is someone for each Wisden. Whether the edition is excellent or well-read, there is someone who will want it, want to read it and want to enjoy it and for many the joy of collecting was re-ignited under the most awful of circumstances.

By the end of 2020 we were in lockdown again and the demand continued. It was noticeable that the online auction sites such as eBay were not selling as many Wisdens as they had done during the early weeks of lockdown and yet by the end of January 2021 the average number of Wisdens listing per day was over 1,700.

I have never deliberately over-described a Wisden, indeed I tend to err on the side of caution and I know from conversations and feedback that if I am happy to describe an edition as a 9/10 then it is probably slightly better than a 9/10 but I would rather someone be pleasantly surprised than disappointed.

The importance of condition

What has come out strongly over the past two years is how important condition and the describing of a Wisden actually is, more so than ever. I know there can never be a 'Wisden-selling' standard, there are too many variations and one man's 'excellent' is another man's 'very good' — but the rise in prices for 'very good' editions to the pricing level of 'excellent' editions does mean that buyers have to be even more careful.

The demand for Wisdens has been incredible over the past two years — let no one tell you that there has been a dip in the market or that interest is waning, far far from it. Indeed even pre-pandemic there was no let up in the demand from collectors but there are some factors that I will chat about next time, primarily the shortage of a lot of editions, the lack of quality older Wisdens and if there is any likelihood of prices coming down.

Bill